

# 成田良悟

Ryohgo Narita

# 吉原



電撃文庫



「……気付いてる？」

「気付かないわけないだろ、姉さん。あのストーカー女、自分の身を隠そうともしない。ストーカーっていう自覚も無いんだ

「始末しようか？」

「あら——私が一番誇れるのは  
『俺だ』と

「俺だとか言つたらダッショウで逃げるよ、マジで」

貴方のそんいふ冷め方所 姫吉

An illustration of a man with dark skin and short hair, wearing a blue headband with white stripes and a light blue shirt. He is looking towards the right side of the frame. In the background, there is a window with a grid pattern. The scene is set outdoors with some greenery visible at the bottom.

誠一くんの事はできるだけ調べたよ。だからまだ全然駄目なの。まだ誠一くんは私の事を知らないから。だからわざとわざと私の事を教えてあげるの。私がどれだけ誠一さんを好きなのか私がどれだけ誠一さんを幸せにしてあげられるのか私が

本居宣長

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「黒バイク」を見た奴には幸運が訪れるという……今、俺が考えた。よし、この幸運を逃さない内に出会い系サイトにアクセスだ

もしくは危ない橋を渡ろうとしてる  
この俺の**生き様**が怖いのか？

たが現実味が無くて……」

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「え？」

「ううん、何でもないよ」

(ああ、あの次元を超越した  
ような存在は、一体何を思い

きっと僕には及びもつかない  
事を考へてるんだろうなあ)



(しまつた…今日の世界ふしき発見、

録画予約するの忘れてた。

今から帰れば間に合うかな？ …急ぐとしよう

(それにしても…今日も「」の街は平和だな)

(やはり、何の変哲も無い日常というのが一番安心できるのだろう。  
今しがた擦れ違った学生達がうらやましい限りだな)



「あら、また臨也と静雄が喧嘩してるわよ」

「いつもの事だろうが。なあ遊馬崎」

「うわおう、黒バイクつすよ。  
凄い走り方つすよねえ、ありえねえつすよ。  
CGですよ絶対。でなきや幽靈がなんかだ」

「聞いてねえし」

「あああ、俺に幽靈が見えるってんなら、  
どうせなら美少女の幽靈が  
見たいつすよねえ。  
背後靈でも地縛靈でもいいから」

「アストラル？ アストラル？」

電撃？ 電撃文庫？

「おい……ああ、駄目だ」「いつら……  
完全に自分の世界に入つていやがる」

「あー、そういうヤドタチ、知つてる？  
電撃文庫ってさー、カバーを外した背表紙の下に  
番号書いてあるじやん、あれってどういう意味なんだろね？」

「知るか。……お、始まつたぞ」

「頼むよシズちゃん」

「……」

「俺のナイフが君の腹に刺さつてるんだからさ、  
ちよつとは痛がつてくれないかな」

「……」

「それにさ、俺、シズちゃんの内臓えぐるつもりで  
勢い良く突いたのに、どうして『ミリ』ぐらいしか  
刺さつてないのかな。  
どういう腹筋してんのさ」

「……」

「今、シズちゃんが片手でぶら下げる  
その喫茶店の看板、  
何キロあるか知ってるの？  
お互い大人なんだからさ、  
常識の範囲内で行動しようよ、……ね？」

「……常識的に言えばよオー、  
これで殴りや手前は死ぬよな？ ——だから死ね」

殺殺殺殺殺殺  
斬殺煮殺焼殺刺殺撲殺  
抹殺压殺摩殺千切殺  
活殺否全殺絶殺苦殺  
完殺殺殺殺殺殺殺……

(ああ……正んでいる)

(今日もこの街は正んでいる)

(なんて心地いいんだろう……)

(ああ、もっとだ、もっともっと正んでくれないものだろうか。  
世界の表と裏も、昼と夜も、現実と幻想も……)  
(そして、僕と彼女の存在が絡み合つて……)  
永遠に離れる事の無いように……)

Namie: "...Have you noticed?"

Seiji: "There's no way anyone could have missed that, Sis. That stalker girl doesn't even bother hiding herself. She doesn't even know that she's stalking."

Namie: "---Shall I have her dealt with?"

Seiji: "Don't, Sis, it's a bad thing to kill people. Please, live a more respectful life that you can be proud of."

Namie: "Ah...but what makes me the most proud is..."

Seiji: "If you're going to say it's me, I'll be running away, for real."

Namie: "...I just love how cold you are sometimes."

Mika: (What should I do? What should I do? Seiji-san is here! It hasn't even been seven hours since I started looking for Seiji-san and we've already run into each other. That's why Seiji-san is so cool ! He's my destined lover! There's a beautiful woman next to him, but I won't be jealous, fufu. Because I know that person is Seiji-san's older sister! That's Namie-san, who holds an important position at Yagiri Pharmaceuticals. She is still single, and her three sizes are--- [omitted] -- I know all sorts of things about Seiji-san's family. I've found out as much as I could about Seiji-san, but it is still far from enough. Because Seiji-san doesn't know about me. That's why, that's why, I will tell him lots and lots and lots more about myself, how much I like Seiji-san, how happy I will make him, how much I'll make Seiji-san, Seiji-san, Seiji-san, Seiji-san---)

Simon: Young lady, why do you run away? // If you only have a little your health will be fine... // Are you thinking about your diet? // It's fine if it's just once. // Hey, young lady. // You get a discount for your first time.//Ah, Mister, what do you think? // It's cheap, it's delicious, first-time customer, alcohol, discount. // Sushi, good. Sushi's good, it's slimming. // Your health will be fine if you don't eat too much. // Healthy sushi, eat sushi. // Our sushi is Japan's best...

Kida: "Oh, it's the Black Motorbike."

Anri: "Ah..."

Mikado: "-----!"

Kida: "People who see the Black Motorbike get good luck...that's what I just thought. Right, let's not let the luck go to waste and go access an online dating site."

Anri: "Isn't it... a little scary...?"

Kida: "Scary? Online dating sites? Fufu, or do you find my way of life scary because it's like crossing dangerous bridges all the time? And this scent of danger will make Anri fall for me-"

Anri: "That motorbike... somehow it doesn't feel real..."

Mikado: "Yes, I know what you mean. It's almost like it doesn't belong in this world."

Kida: "...Are you ignoring me?"

Mikado: "It is scary. But...that's exactly why I think it's cool. It's like I would want to turn into that being if

only I could-----"

Anri: "Eh?"

Mikado: "No, nothing."

Celty: [.....]

Mikado: (Aah, what is on the mind of that being that transcends us just by existing? It must be something I can't even begin to imagine, right?)

Celty: (Crap... I forgot to record today's 'Discovering World's Wonders'. Will I make it in time if I head back now? ...I'll have to hurry.)

Celty: (Even so--- This city is as peaceful as ever today.)

Celty: (I feel most at home in an everyday life with nothing strange going on. I really envy those students I passed by a moment ago.)

Karisawa: "Oh my, Izaya and Shizuo are fighting again."

Kadota: "They've always been. Right, Yumasaki?"

Yumasaki: "Woah, It's the Black Motorbike. The way it runs is so cool. That can't be real. It's got to be CG. Or a ghost or something."

Kadota: "Not listening, are you?"

Yumasaki: "Aaah, if I ever see a ghost, I'd like it to be a cute girl, you know. Doesn't matter if it's a haunting spirit or an earth-bound spirit."

Karisawa: "Astral? Astral? Dengeki? Dengeki Bunko?"

Kadota: "Oi... Ahh, these guys are hopeless... They've drifted off into their own world."

Karisawa: "Ah, speaking of which, Dotachin, did you know? Once you take off the book covers you'll find numbers written on Dengeki Bunko books at the bottom of their backs, what can those numbers mean?"

Kadota: "As if I care. ...Hey, they're starting."

Izaya: "I'm begging you, Shizu-chan."

Shizuo: "..."

Izaya: "I've stabbed my knife in the stomach, won't you at least look like you're in pain?"

Shizuo: "..."

Izaya: "Also, I wanted to carve out your entrails so I thrust pretty hard, Shizu-chan. Why won't the knife go in deeper than 5 millimeters? What are your abdominal muscles made of?"

Shizuo: "..."

Izaya: "That cafe signboard you're holding right now with one hand, do you know how many kilos it weighs? We're both grown men now, so try to behave within the realm of common sense...would you?"

Shizuo: "...Since we're talking about common sense, you'll die if I hit you with this, right? ---So die."

Izaya: (Ah, I'll be screwed if I don't run away now...I really can't handle him. I can't predict his next moves at all. What is he thinking about when he's fighting me?)

Shizuo: (Kill kill kill kill beat him smash him kick him chop him cook him burn him stab him pummel him murder him crush him grind him cut him into a thousand pieces kill him alive no kill him completely absolutely and painfully kill him fully kill kill kill, kill kill...)

Shinra: (Aah--- it's becoming twisted.)

Shinra: (This city is becoming twisted again today.)

Shinra: (It's such a nice feeling, isn't it--- / Aah, more, won't it become even more twisted? / So twisted that the world's surface and underbelly, day and night, reality and illusion---)

Shinra: (And then my and her existences, everything will meld together...and never part again-----)



プロローグ  
Prologue

# Prologue

---

"It's so exciting! So exciting! So very exciting! There are still so many things I don't know about in this city! Even as I speak, something new is appearing, emerging, and something else is fading away. How can I leave a place where so many humans gather? HUMAN LOVE! I love humans! I love you all!"

In Ikebukuro, Tokyo, strange groups of people gather: youths who yearn for an extraordinary life, trouble-making hooligans, crazy stalker girls, informants who sell information for their own enjoyment, underground doctors who treat unconventional 'ailments', high schoolers obsessed with the occult and, of course, a headless black biker.

Together, these strange characters tell a very unusual story, and very intriguing one at that. Twisted as they are, however, they still can talk about love.

"Seiji-san! Seiji-san! Are you home? I'm here again! Oh my, you accidentally locked the door again? Now I can't get in!"

Danger, danger. The stalker has invaded my home. She's been banging on my door and she won't even ring the doorbell. What the hell is she thinking?

"The door's locked! Seiji-san, you aren't sleeping, are you? Ah—it's my first time calling on a guy while he's asleep! I'm so bold!"

Warning, warning...I've been on my toes since last week. Last week I saved two bumpkins from being harassed by some hooligan. I'd asked and found out that they were going to the same high school as I was and would be studying in the same first-year class. But I never expected for things to turn out this way. The other girl was a polite little goody two shoes, but this one...

"Well...actually I...I've always liked Seiji-san! Do you remember? During the entrance exam, I was sitting right beside Seiji-san! The guy sitting to my right had this totally awesome name like 'Ryuugamine Mikado' and I wanted to know what kind of name the person on my left had, so I turned and—it was love at first sight! From that day on I've always remembered Seiji-san's name! Even though I didn't have the guts to confess to you that day...but just last week, Seiji-san saved me, and then I thought at that moment...ah, this must be fate! Do you know how much courage that gave me? So-- So, let me look at you again, won't you? Seiji-san, I really want to look at that strong, energetic face of yours! Please please, pretty please, Seiji-san!"

Caution, caution. After I saved this kid, she'd secretly followed me home. And she did it every day of the week after that. Even after I told her to fuck off plenty of times. That crap she shouted just now? I've heard it two thousand times.

"Don't tell me you're ill, Seiji-san?! Are you so sick that you can't answer me? That's no good! Hurry and open the door, Seiji-san! Since the day of the entrance exam, I've been looking up stuff about you, Seiji-san! I know your birthday, about your family...everything about you!"

Police. Police. I told her I was going to call the police—she'd only backed down after I told her that.

Three hours after the invasion, I guessed that the girl had already gone home, so I decided to buy some stuff at the convenience store downstairs. As I held the toothpaste and weekly in my hand, images of that denpa-girl flashed across my mind.

My first impression of her was a rather pretty girl with a touch of maturity and sophistication. Perhaps ‘beautiful lady’ would be a better description. But why would a lovely girl like her have no boyfriend? What I’d just experienced was the perfect answer to that question. No matter how cute that denpa-girl was, I would still politely decline her affections. If it had been someone who really wanted a girlfriend, they wouldn’t have to think twice about accepting her love; as for me, I’m not interested. Not even a little. Because I already have a ‘girlfriend’.

But what about the school entrance ceremony tomorrow? As I walked down the narrow corridor, towards my apartment, I kept on thinking about it.

If I go to school tomorrow, I’ll have to meet that girl. I’d be better off not going. Ah...it doesn’t matter. I have a girlfriend already. She’s quiet and beautiful, a far cry from that girl. As long as I’m with her, it doesn’t matter whether I go to high school or not. Maybe I should just work at Sis’ office and be one of those part-time student workers or something.

Ah I remember! I finally remember why I saved those girls. Even though these are completely different matters, that girl really looked like my girlfriend, so I’d saved her. Now that I think of it, it was a totally stupid thing to do. I’d saved her just because she looked like her, but how was I to know that she was actually this kind of person?

I kept thinking about it as I slipped my house keys into the lock.

Eh? Weird.

—The door’s unlocked.

Danger danger—my whole body was stricken with alarm.

Sirens were wailing; I opened the door to see a pair of girl’s shoes.

“Se-Seiji-san...”

As I stepped into the apartment, I saw that stalker girl standing there. Just standing still.

It was then I came to realize that, even though I was looking at the girl who had broken into my house, I was strangely calm. Because I was looking at the expression on her face the whole time.

So I forced a few words out of my mouth and they were cold, colder than I’d expected. So cold that even I was surprised.

“So you saw it?”

“Eh...that...I...uh...”

The expression that unfolded on her face was totally different from before. It was uneasy and full of fear.

...Hmph, so even she was capable of making those expressions.

Then I was sure. I was sure—this kid had seen what she shouldn’t have seen.

“That...that...Seiji-san...I...uh...I won’t tell anyone! Even if you’re like this, I still really like Seiji-san! Um...so...so...don’t worry! No matter what kind of hobbies you have, I’ll definitely accommodate

them...so...that...that's..."

The tables were turned. Now she was the one who couldn't attack.

"It's alright."

"Seiji-san!"

After what I'd said, the stalker sounded hopeful once again.

"It's alright."

"Sei...ji-san?"

She'd noticed the coldness in my glare. In that moment, a cloud of unease drifted across her face. I wanted to see an expression of complete despair, so I repeated:

*"It's alright."*

"Seiji!"

When Sis brought home two underlings that night, I was sitting in the living room, eating cup noodles. The two underlings deftly placed the stalker girl's body into a suitcase and brought it out. Sis scanned the room, looked at the bloodstains on the wall, and then hugged me tightly:

"It's alright, don't worry about a thing."



"Seiji, you don't have to worry about anything. Your sister will take care of everything, understand?"

"Sis, I don't care about that girl. I only care about 'her'."

"So Seiji was the one who took her...it doesn't matter, you just leave everything to your sister. It's no problem; as long as I'm here, I won't let anything happen to Seiji...especially those horrible police officers—I'll never let them take you away, never, never, so you can just sit back and relax."

After Sis finished talking, she gave the underlings a few orders and left.

I don't think I should go work at Sis's office because it seems that Sis has some underworld connections the company doesn't know about. Like those underlings today. They saw a dead person and just acted on instruction without flinching even once. That's not a good thing.

I'm not going to work with those evil people. If I do, won't I become like them?

And if I become like them and get arrested, she'll be so lonely. I'll never let anything like that happen—I'll never let her be lonely.

As I watched Sis's underlings stoically scrubbing the bloodstains off the wall, I forced down those overcooked cup noodles.

Ah, those noodles tasted really bad.

This is a very twisted story.

—A twisted...love story.



# 第一章 原影 Chapter

# Chapter 1: Shadow

---

Chatroom (Holiday, Evening)

『Like I was saying, the strongest group in Ikebukuro now has got to be the Dollars!』

[Although I've never met a Dollars member, I've heard a lot of rumours about them.]

『That's because they don't like being in the spotlight! Besides, everyone's talking about them online!』

【Ah I see...hm...Kanra-san seems to know a lot about Ikebukuro.】

『Nah...not that well.』

『Ah...then then then, have you heard about the black biker incident?』

【Black biker?】

[Wow...]

『It's caused a lot of commotion in Shinjuku and Ikebukuro! It was even on the news yesterday!』



★Tokyo, somewhere in the Bunkyo district (Normal day, midnight)

“You’re...a...monster!! AHHHHHHH!”

The youth let out a piercing scream, raised the metal pipe in his hand, and fled. It was midnight and the youth was making a frenzied dash out of the multi-storey carpark. He was gripping metal pipe in his right hand so tightly that it was almost the same temperature as his body. His hands were numbing from the cold sweat seeping from his palms.

There was no one at all, only a few cars waiting silently for their owners.

Aside from the sound of his own heavy footsteps, his breathing, and his rapidly accelerating heartbeat, the carpark was completely silent. Each sound resonated in his ears.

Treading between the huge concrete pillars, the hoodlum howled, “Sh-shit! Shit Shit! Shit! I’m...I’m...I’m...gonna get killed! Fuck this!”

Though the youth’s eyes blazed with anger, the words that spilled out of his mouth were clearly fearful.

Till this moment, the tattoo on the hoodlum’s neck had been a constant source of fear and intimidation to his enemies. But today, the tattoo on his neck had been distorted into an unrecognisable form by his own fear. A second later, the indigo tattoo he’d acquired on a whim was marked with the unmistakable imprint of a certain black boot—

♂♀

«Actually, it's a rumour that's been circulating for a long time. Since most phones now have a camera function, many people have managed to take pictures of the black rider, and it was an instant hit!!»

[Yeah, I know about that too. But it's not really an urban legend, or anything exotic or bizarre is it? I think it's probably the Bosozoku...but then again, they haven't been getting together for drag races lately...]

«But the fact that it doesn't have any headlights makes it weird enough!»

«If it was human, that is...»

【I don't get you.】

«Ah that...to put it bluntly, it's probably a monster!»

♂♀

The boots met flesh to the sound of a soft, cracking noise. The youth was spun in a half-circle midair and flew overhead in a distorted arc.

Though he was concussed by the time the side of his body hit the ground, his limbs still flailed in panic. It was bitingly cold and his body was numb, so he could hardly feel the chill of the concrete. It was like the youth was blindly fleeing from some kind of nightmare. He turned, realising that the source of his fear was hot on his heels.

What he saw seemed to be a shadow—in fact, the very definition of the word. It was unmistakably a ‘shadow’.

The shadow was wearing a black, full-body biker suit with no frivolous designs or emblems. It was so dark that it looked like it had been pitch-black to begin with and dyed with ink to deepen the color. If it hadn't been for the fluorescent lights of the carpark, perhaps, he wouldn't have noticed that someone was there.

But the most ominous part of the shadow was the peculiar helmet it wore above its neck. Together with the pure blackness of body suit, the patterns on the helmet and its shape melded together into some kind of abstract sense of artistry. Though these things contrasted greatly together, they didn't particularly clash.

The visor of the helmet was as dark as the tinted windows of luxury cars. All that could be seen was the constant flickering of the fluorescent lamps and nothing of the expression under the helmet.

“...”

The shadow exuded nothing but a sense of serenity and didn't seem remotely like a living thing. The youth observed the shadow creature with a look contorted by fear and disgust.

“I...I-I-I-I...I don't remember offending no Terminator!”

This would normally sound like a joke, but the youth was clearly not in the mood to crack jokes anymore.

“T-talk! Talk! Who are you? What the hell are you?”

To the youth, the very existence of such a shadow was completely mind-blowing. He had been doing what he was supposed to do, as he normally did at the bottom floor of the carpark. He was just supposed to run some 'errands' and then leave. The errand was a mere delivery of some 'goods' for a client and then a collection of more 'goods'. That was all there was to it, and he had done what he always did. What the hell did he do wrong? What the hell had he done to attract the attention of this...monster—

The youth and his 'colleagues' had only desired a normal work day, but today, their usual routine had been disrupted without a single warning.

As they waited at the entrance of the carpark for the late arrival of one of their colleagues, the shadow had suddenly appeared. A motorcycle had passed the entrance noiselessly, coming to a stop about ten metres away from where they were.

The youth and his colleagues had noticed many oddities as 'it' had passed.

Firstly, when that motorcycle was passing, it hadn't made a single sound. Perhaps there had been the slight sound of the friction of rubber tires against the road, but most importantly, the engine had been completely silent. Of course, the rider could have switched off his engine and merely allowed his momentum to carry him past the entrance; even if this was so, the engine should have made some noise before it had been turned off, but no one had heard any sound from it at all.

The weird thing was, both the motorbike and its rider were completely black. The engine box, the transmission shaft, and even the rim of the wheels were completely black. There were no headlights, and where the license plate was supposed to be, there was only a black metal plaque. Everyone could only manage to discern that the shadow was in fact a motorbike because it was faintly illuminated by the street lamps and the moonlight.

What was even more peculiar was the fact that the rider's black hand was holding a large item. The object's size was comparable to that of the rider, and down the narrower end, an opaque liquid was dripping onto the asphalt.

“Koji...?”

One of the youth's companions could make out just what the ragged object was. The rider, still on his motorcycle, loosed his grip and flung the object—no, 'him' onto the asphalt.

It was the person they had been waiting for, the 'colleague' who was late. His face was swollen, like he had been beaten ruthlessly and blood dribbled from his nose and mouth.

“It can't be...”

“Who the hell is he?”

Everyone felt rather strange, but none of them felt fearful. They didn't even feel angry about seeing one of their colleagues as beaten as he was, probably because this group was made up of colleagues and nothing more.

“Whaddaya want? Whaddaya want? What the hell do you want?”

One of them, a man wearing a hoodie who looked like the dumbest of the lot stepped forth. There was only one of him and five of them. They had an advantage in terms of numbers, which this made the youth especially arrogant. The moment he'd gotten to the motorbike's side, however, the tables had been turned. It was now one-on-one and the only one who noticed was the one straddling the motorbike.

"..."

*Crunch.*

There was an ominous shattering sound, something completely unearthly. A sound that made one feel nothing but unease. A sound that set off internal sirens, wailing, 'Danger, danger...'

At the same time, the man in the hoodie keeled over, his face smashing against the asphalt.

"What the—?"

The others were alarmed. Like they usually did whenever they were on a job, they paid close attention to their surroundings. Only then did they realise that the enemy was the motorbike before them and no one else – and that the 'shadow' on the motorcycle was slowly lowering its boot to the ground.

They were watching its movements intently. It had set its foot on the ground, which meant that its foot had been raised above the ground earlier, but the more observant of the colleagues were watching something else entirely.

They were watching what was under the boot: the glasses of the man who had arrived in a hoodie.

Now they finally understood what had transpired.

—The 'shadow', straddling the motorbike had kicked out a leg and knocked down the guy in the hoodie with ease.

If they'd seen the guy's face, they would have noticed that he'd broken his nose. The 'shadow' rider had actually calculated the distance of the kick so that it wasn't enough not to send him flying, while it'd used the indentation in the sole of his boot to catch onto his nose and twist it.

The onlookers could hardly grasp this. Half of them found it strange. How could someone who had been kicked that way fall flat? Without a second thought, the other half of the group immediately grabbed the police baton and the stun guns they had strapped to their waists.

"What...what the hell happened? Eh...ah? But...how did he get hurt...?"

While the youths were deliberating on just that, two of their colleagues let out howls of rage and charged at the motorcycle.

"Ah, hey..."

As the youths thought of what to say, they saw the 'shadow' soundlessly slipping off the motorbike. They could hear crunching as he stepped on the broken glass underfoot. The 'shadow' was completely expressionless as he merely took noiseless steps towards them. He moved elegantly, a shadow personified.

The events that transpired next were to become deeply ingrained in the memory of the young hoodlum

and felt then like they were played out in slow motion. Perhaps this was because the situation was too surreal to completely comprehend, or because his sense of danger was rapidly increasing by the second.

One of the men had shoved the stun gun into the 'shadow's' body.

—But, could electricity penetrate leather?

He saw the 'shadow' shudder violently as that question came to mind. Apparently it could. Problem solved. The man breathed a sigh of relief and made to shock him twice more, but in the next moment, the hoodlum's chest tightened once again with anxiety.

The 'shadow' was shuddering violently, but he'd shot out a hand to grab one of the other men who was armed with a baton.

"ARGH!!"

Unlike the 'shadow', who had merely been shaking, the baton-wielding guy was violently jolted backwards violently and fell on the ground in a heap.

"You bastard..."

The stun gun guy suddenly noticed that the 'shadow' was reaching for him now and hastily turned off his stun gun. The situation did not improve and the 'shadow' had begun to close his hand around his neck.

Even as he struggled with all his strength, the 'shadow' did not loose his relentless grip. Even when he kicked the 'shadow' hard in the shins, its helmet exuded only calm and darkness.

"Eh...ah..."

The stun gun guy was strangled until his eyes rolled up into their sockets, leaving only the whites of his eyes visible. He collapsed in much the same way the baton guy had.

—Not good.

Even though he didn't really know what was going on, he knew that whatever it was, it wasn't good. He hadn't moved an inch. Including Koji, four out of six of them were already down. Terror manifested itself in the hoodlum's chest, not because he was cowardly, but because he had no idea what was going on at all.

"Looks like he knows some hand to hand..."

The hoodlum was scared shitless, but his colleague on his right was much calmer and whispered his speculations.

"Ga-san."

In response, the hoodlum called his name needily. The man that the hoodlum called Ga-san could have been considered the leader of the colleagues' group. He watched the 'shadow's' movements silently. Even though there was no sign of intense fear in his eyes, it couldn't be said that he was entirely composed.

Ga-san drew a large knife out of his jacket. "I don't know what you've dabbled in...but you'll die if you get stabbed with this," he said cautiously as he held the knife in hand and staggered toward the 'shadow'.

The knife twirled in his hands. It was much larger than a fruit knife or a dagger, but it wasn't as large as those knives in mangas. The hilt of the knife fit perfectly in a palm, and the blade, which was about as long as its hilt, gleamed coldly.

"I don't care what you've done before, but I don't think you can hold this off with your bare hands...huh?  
Huh?"

The actions of the 'shadow' brought his provocations to an abrupt halt.

The 'shadow' bent down slightly and picked up the two things before him: the baton and the stun gun that the two hoodlums had wielded before.

"..."

In his right hand, he held a stun gun. In his left was a police baton. It was a strange form of nito-ryuu.

The carpark, previously as quiet as it was eerie, had plunged into total silence.

"Eh...weird... It can't be! You're not using hand-to-hand?" the leader asked, breaking the silence. He sounded as if he was questioning himself instead of the 'shadow'.

Though his question sounded a little like a joke, fear was thick in his voice. If only they'd attacked this guy all at once from the get-go! Now it seemed like there was no way out and he'd look bad if he decided to retreat.

The hoodlum standing behind him was rooted to the spot. If the opponent had been some gang member or the police, he would have jumped in to help without a second thought. No, all four of them would have stepped in to help.

But at this very moment, the 'thing' they were up against was just too strange. They were no longer acting the way they had been earlier. Standing before them was just someone wearing a biker's suit, but the unpleasant aura that the 'shadow' exuded made him uneasy, as though his own existence was flowing into some otherworldly place.

Perhaps because he'd noticed the hoodlum's uneasiness, Ga-san gritted his teeth and yelled, "You asshole!  
I only have one knife on me and you're cowerin' over there! You little pussy!"

As he protested against how unfair things were for him, the 'shadow' had silently gotten to his feet and had faced the leader.

And then the hoodlum saw 'that' materialise into a tangible form right before his very eyes.

♂♀

《The black rider isn't human.》

【Then what is it?】

[Just an idiot.]

《Dotachin says it's probably the Grim Reaper.》

【Dotachin?】

《I've seen it before, actually...the black biker chasing someone.》

【Who's Dotachin?】

[Did you call the police?]

《How should I put it... Basically, the fact that it had that thing meant it couldn't be human.》

【...Hey don't ignore me! Who's Dotachin?!】

《At first I wasn't sure, but then I realised it had come from inside his body—》

【...】

【?】

[I think he got disconnected.]

【Huh? But he was just in the middle of both stories! What came from inside his body?】

【And who's Dotachin??】

♂♀

“...?”

Before the hoodlum and the leader, the 'shadow' was doing something strange. The stun gun he had just bent down to pick up was now safely placed upon the seat of his motorcycle.

Maybe using two weapons at once was too tiring for him? the hoodlum thought, until he saw that the 'shadow' had taken the police baton in both hands—

The 'shadow' bent the baton like it was a chopstick.

“What—?”

Astonishment crossed their faces and for a moment they wore identical expressions. They couldn't begin to fathom what kind of trick that guy was playing on them. How the hell had he bent that baton?! The 'shadow' was petite and did not appear at all to be capable of possessing that kind of monstrous strength.

More importantly, the fact that the 'shadow' had managed to dispose of a specialised weapon just like that added to the unease growing in their hearts. They felt like this was all becoming more real.

The 'shadow' was now empty-handed. The hoodlum had thus picked up a metal pipe that had been leaning on the surrounding wall. The leader saw the motion from the corner of his eye and raised his knife as well.

Cold sweat poured down their foreheads. The feeling of the sweat on their skin was the only thing they had to convince themselves what they were seeing before them was real.

"You...you tryin' to scare us? Well?" the leader said carelessly, glancing at the bent baton.

A drop of cold sweat happened to trickle into his mouth, which he swallowed slowly. As for the hoodlum, he had stopped bothering to look around. He could only hold the metal pipe quietly while he panted heavily.

His breathing was getting more rapid, and he realised that his feet, back and jaw were trembling. It seemed that the shadow's efforts to 'scare' them had indeed served its purpose.

The 'shadow' stepped toward them, almost as if he wanted a closer look at their terrified expressions.

"You're still empty-handed. You've got guts."

In comparison to the hoodlum, who was scared shitless, the leader sounded like he had steeled himself. A fierce glow burned in his eyes as he held his knife tightly and strode confidently toward the 'shadow'.

The distance between both of them was now about three metres. With just a couple of steps, it would be in range of his knife.

—Ga-san wouldn't back out at the last minute. He wouldn't chicken out.

The young hoodlum was clear on this point. He readied his metal pipe behind his leader, preparing to support him.

The leader took another step forward. The animosity he had previously possessed had transformed into pure, murderous intent. Because the hoodlum felt sure that his leader would stab the guy with all he had, with the intent to kill, he mustered the courage to provide backup. He had absolutely no reservations about killing. Besides, the guy before him was just a shadow, which could hardly count as really killing anyone.

The hoodlum honestly thought that they had a chance at victory now that his leader was moving in for the kill. Strength rushed into the grip he had on the metal pipe, but in the next moment, the possibility of victory and all their intentions vanished as a wisp of smoke.

They watched as the 'shadow' reached for its back and a part of its black body began to swell. An inky smoke was billowing from the shadow's body, smoke that seemed to move with a mind of its own. The smoke had become as black as the rider's glove as it massed in the 'shadow's' black gloved palm and writhed like a snake.

The black 'stream' was particularly vivid against the sky, like an inky paintbrush that had been dipped into clear water. Once the movements of the inky stream slowed, they began to condense and form an object that was as equally dark as the rest of him. The two people standing witness were transfixed by this spectacle and had been rendered completely silent. Standing still, illuminated by the street lamps and the fluorescent lights from the multi-storey carpark, the two men finally understood. Their opponent wasn't human. It really was not human.

As black vapour separated from the 'shadow's body, they noticed that a cloud of black smoke was engulfing its body, slowly dissolving its figure until everything but its helmet had become a blur under the glare of the light.

They no longer knew what to make of the situation. They were absolutely confused. Escape was no longer an option, so they could only fall back on their previous plan. The knife-wielder, dazed, pulled back the

hand holding the knife and shot it out again, driving toward the shadow's abdomen—

But at the instant before the knife came into contact with the shadow's body, the leader felt a kind of opposing force knocking back his weapon. He didn't lose his grip, but he did lose his balance, which left an opening for the shadow to retaliate.

"?!"

The black mass that had knocked back the knife became dimly visible in the darkness.

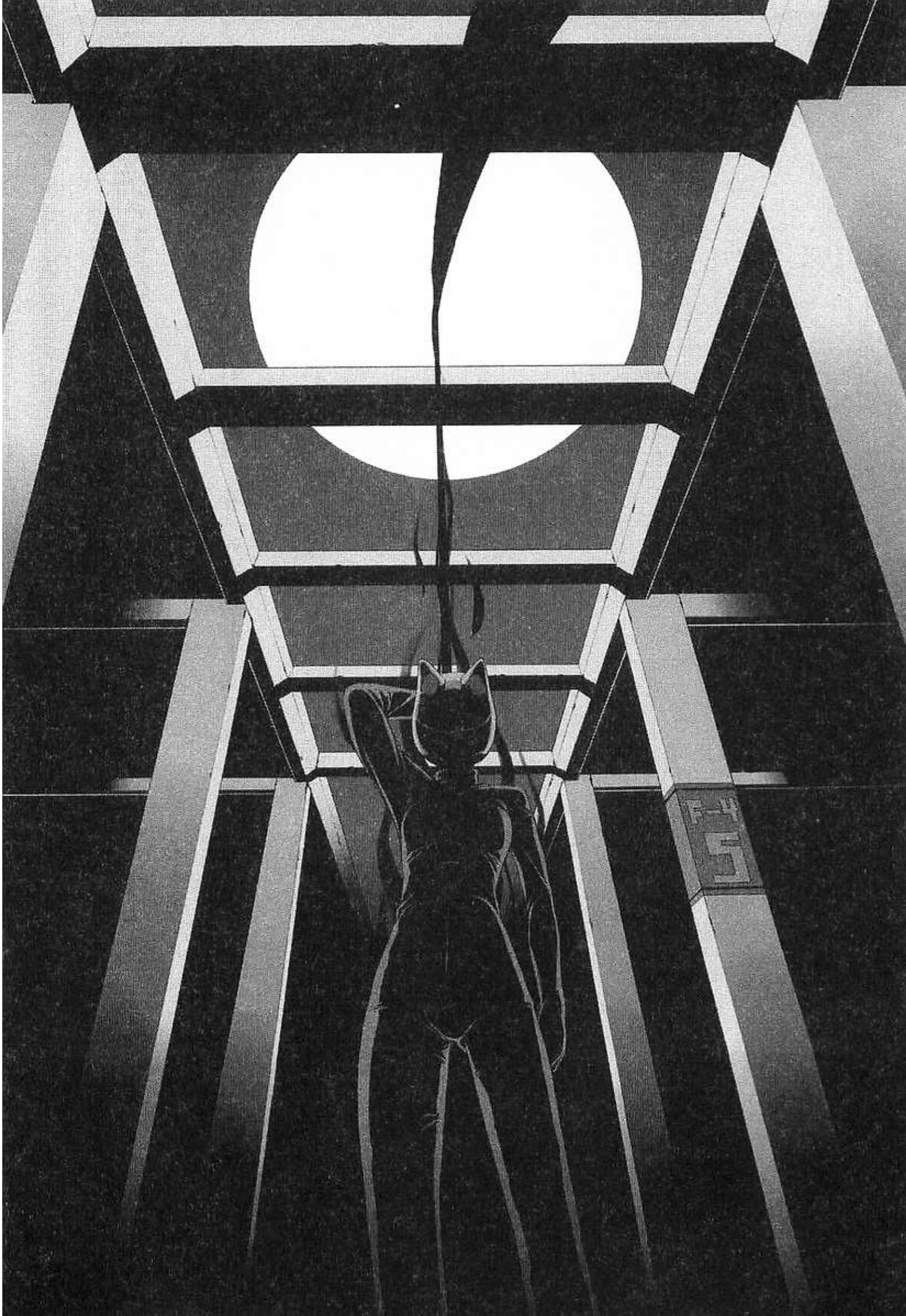
The 'thing' was totally black. It was blacker than the deepest darkness. It seemed to be absorbing all surrounding light, quivering as though it was alive. The object that had manifested itself out of the billowing black smoke was horrifyingly out of place in Japan's most modern area, but a 'shadow' dressed as a biker was wielding it, so it too was blending in seamlessly with their surroundings.

The object that had materialised in the shadow's hand was even more menacing and evil in the darkness of the night.

Onlookers would automatically associate it with 'death'.

—The 'thing' was almost as tall as the 'shadow' – a huge double-edged scythe.

♂♀



—Kanra-san has entered the chatroom—

《Sorry I got disconnected~ My internet connection isn't very good today, so I think I'll just go to bed~》

[Oh, goodnight then~]

【But you haven't finished the stories! And who in the world is Dotachin...?】

《I'll tell you next time~ Ah ah, but I'll tell you one last thing—》

♂♀

In the end, the hoodlum ended up like this.

He had nowhere to run in that multi-storey carpark.

He never found out what had happened to the leader. This particular hoodlum wasn't particularly brave, but after witnessing such mind-boggling things, he couldn't really care about anything like that anymore. He still, however, had yet to see that enormous scythe.

At first he told himself that perhaps everything that had just transpired was some kind of illusion. Later he realized that no matter what it was, there was nothing he could do to change things, so he immediately decided to stop thinking about it.

He'd received a sharp kick to his neck. Even though he could hear cracking noises that indicated he was being kicked, it didn't feel like his bones were broken too badly. The only excruciating aches and pains he felt were centralized at the crook of his neck. It was so painful that it was almost numb.

To the hoodlum, though, the pain was a very small matter.

"Please...pl-please...please...hold on...p-please h-hold...on...please...hold...o-on..." he babbled with all the pathetic politeness of a loser dog.

He had finally come to understand what kind of situation he was in. Even though he still felt he was dreaming and could rationalize none of what had happened to him, the terror he felt was real enough to wake him up from his stupor.

Not that he completely understood. He did not completely understand what the 'shadow' was (perhaps some kind of deity) or why he had run into trouble like this.

It was most likely work-related. The jobs he did were dangerous and it was very likely that he'd make some enemies along the way, but 'enemies' usually entailed cops or violent gang members, or even their targets—illegal immigrants or brats that ran away from home.

He had mentally prepared for each job he took and made sure not to stir up trouble as he did them, but he'd never expected to see a 'shadow' garbed in a biker suit and had no idea what to do now that he had. The best strategy he could have come up with was a hasty retreat, but now even that was eliminated and the hoodlum was trapped. Now the only possibilities the hoodlum could see were an honourable death or surrender, but it was impossible to predict the motives of his opponent well enough to make a decision on which. Finally, in his desperation, the hoodlum adopted the most cowardly attitude he could muster to try to negotiate with the 'shadow'. He feared that if he didn't speak, he'd be consumed by his own fear.

"You... You've got the wrong person... I won't resist...so let me go ... Please... I'm sorry, I'm sorry!"

Goosebumps were prickling up all over the hoodlum's body as if someone from the yakuza had pointed a gun at his head. He did not make a sound or move from his spot as the 'shadow' watched the previously aggressive hoodlum melting into a cowardly puddle. All he did was look around, as though he was searching for something. With his back to the hoodlum, he moved toward a van parked inside the carpark.

It was a commonly sighted vehicle around Ikebukuro Station. At night, it was impossible to see inside it because the back windows had been tinted black.

It was like the 'shadow' could see into the black tinted windows, and he moved towards the van without any hesitation.

Ah? Eh? Not good!

That was the van they used for 'work'. Although he didn't know the intentions of the 'shadow', and though there were many other cars around, the shadow was very clearly moving toward the van and the hoodlum was sure that it was his target.

Hey! Wait! Shit! This is absolute crap!

The unexpected behaviour of the 'shadow' chilled the hoodlum to the bone. His mind was already brimming with the fear of this 'shadow', but now a different kind of fear was manifesting from somewhere deeper...

Eh...eh...ah...ah...wait! Wait! Wait ahhhhh! If ... If you reveal what's inside the van, we're done for! Aw crap, this is bad. Shit, shit, shit, shit—

What the hell is he doing? What the fuck does he think he's doing?

Two different fears were interwoven in the hoodlum's mind. The first was the fear of the unreal things he was seeing, the other was the fear of the all-too-real reality unfolding before him...

If the contents of that van are exposed, I can be as sure as hell that the police will find out, and I might even get 'taken care of'! I'll be murdered and my corpse's gonna be buried in the forests of Mount Fuji!

His feet trembled violently.

I have to think of something, think of something quickly...but there's just no way to kill this pretentious wannabe biker.

As morbid thoughts of his death overcame his fears, he racked his brains for a solution.

And after a while, he finally managed to think of something: he'd driven his own convertible to the carpark.

The 'shadow' was around ten metres from the van when he came to a quiet halt. He heard the soft slam of a car door closing behind. He made to turn his head at the sound of it, but the roar of an engine resounded in the carpark.

The 'shadow' turned around and saw a bright red convertible speed towards him. It was accelerating faster than thought possible, so the 'shadow' didn't have time to hide behind a pillar.

The 'shadow' hesitated, and decided to forgo his original plan in favor of charging towards the convertible. Originally, he had planned to get as near as possible to car and then jump to the side, but he hadn't expected the hoodlum to be so driven by his fear and accelerate like this. This didn't give the 'shadow' any openings. The hoodlum spun the steering wheel fiercely in his direction.

There was a loud crash and the 'shadow' could be seen twisting in the air. The shadow landed unceremoniously on the cement with a heavy thud.

"Ahahahaha! Hahaha! You asked for it! Don't mess with me! Bastard!"

Feeling the impact of the blow the 'shadow' had made against the car raised the hoodlum's spirits. Delirious with joy, he braked and jumped out of the car even before it had come to a complete stop. He grabbed the metal pipe, set on delivering the final blow to his enemy, but—

"?!"

A black object had fallen a distance in front of the collapsed 'shadow'.

From its bizarre appearance, the item was unquestionably the safety helmet the 'shadow' had just been wearing.

What scared the hoodlum the most was not that the helmet that had fallen on the ground, but the physical oddity of the 'shadow' that had been wearing it.

"Head...head..."

He didn't have a head.

Did I knock it off?! But that's impossible! I've killed someone...but it was in self-defense...

But...it couldn't be...why? Wait...wait...it couldn't be...

The strangeness of the preceding series of events was completely mind-blowing for the hoodlum.

He didn't notice it at all.

Not a drop of blood flowed from the headless body.

♂♀

《The black biker—doesn't have a head.》

♂♀

The terrified hoodlum approached that headless entity and, without any warning, the headless 'shadow' jumped up suddenly.

♂♀

『It doesn't have anything above its neck, but it still can move.』

『Alright then, goodnight everyone~』

—Kanra-san has left the chatroom—

♂♀

“Au-augh?!”

Though the worst possible scenario had descended before his very eyes, the hoodlum did not feel fear. He felt utterly dumbfounded instead.

Secret schemes? Costume? Robots?  
Super Tsuburi? Holograms?  
Dream? Illusion? Delusion? Trickery?

Every possible explanation disappeared without a trace before he could consider them further.

The astonishment the hoodlum felt could have been explained by the fact that he'd seen someone knocked down by a car and sent flying, but now he was standing relatively unscathed before him.

The black smoke once again began to stream from his back like before, and finally became a monstrous scythe.

The sheer astonishment had transformed into real terror; the hoodlum's mouth unconsciously hung open as he let out a wail of absolute despair.

And just as his mouth took in the first breath, there was a sharp impact to the throat—

And the world that the hoodlum had been familiar with became an expanse of darkness.

♂♀

PM Mode 【Hey...Setton-san, I want to ask you something.】

PM Mode [OK.]

PM Mode [What is it? Is it something others shouldn't see?]

PM Mode 【Is Kanra-san always doing stuff like that?】

PM Mode [Isn't it already way past that stage?]

PM Mode 【It's not that bad w, but I only came to this chatroom because Kanra-san invited me.】

PM Mode [Me too. Although Kanra-san can be pretty self-centred, he's still a pretty likeable guy.]

PM Mode 【And he knows so many things we don't.】

PM Mode [But we don't know which ones are real. Ah, I need to remind you of something.]

PM Mode [We were talking about that black biker who roams around the city right?]】

PM Mode [Well, I think we'd be better off having less to do with that sort of thing~]

PM Mode [Goodnight then~]

—Setton-san has left the chatroom—

PM Mode 【Eh?】

PM Mode 【Aw man, he left. Goodnight then~】

PM Mode 【Ah whatever.】

—Tanaka Taro-san has left the chatroom—



The headless rider slowly picked up his helmet and pressed it securely to his dull-skinned neck. A little of the black shadow that leaked out from his collar seemed to seeping into it and merging with the helmet.

When that was done, the headless rider strode in nonchalant silence towards the van.

At the exit of the carpark—

The headless rider had completed his task and soundlessly left the place. He took care of the people lying on the road, unsure if anyone had passed by, or if all the passer-bys had pretended not to notice.

A black motorcycle stopped in the darkness, the engine purring as if it was welcoming its owner. This engine had been clearly silent as it sped across the road, but began to roar on its own, even though the ignition key wasn't in place.

The headless rider stroked the gas tank in response to its purring, as though he was stroking a beloved steed. The motorcycle seemed contented and the engine purring died down, allowing the headless rider to mount it securely.

The black motorcycle with no headlights carried its rider away.

Sailing into starless night sky.

Without a single sound, as though it was dissolving into the darkness—

# 第二章 首なしライダー 客観



# Chapter 2: The Headless Rider, Outsider's Perspective

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Tokyo, Toshima district, Ikebukuro Station  
Tobu Tojo Line, In front of the central exit of the ticket counter

"I wanna go home..." the youth muttered to himself.

This sentence was considered simple when compared to the multitude of thoughts swirling in his head. But it was this simple statement that resonated the most with how he felt now.

Fanning out before his very eyes—people. People, people, people, and people and more people. There was nothing but people in his vision. It was just after six in the evening, the time when the number of people going home from school and work gradually swelled. Of course, it wasn't peak hours yet, but the sheer number of people made him think that they weren't just people, but more like a 'mass'.

Standing in the huge underground space—the middle of Ikebukuro Station, brimming before his eyes was a sea of humans. Rather overwhelmed by the spectacle before him, he almost forgot what he came to do.

A man who looked like he was in the working class bumped into the teenager. The teenager made to apologise, but the man didn't even give him a second look and hurried away. The youth lowered his head and murmured, "So-sorry..."

Then he made his way a pillar a distance away from the ticketing counter and leaned against it.

This teenager—Ryuugamine Mikado, began to feel a strange fluttering inside him, and decided it was from his nervousness. Despite having such an impressive name, the expression on his face was the complete opposite of it. In fact, he looked rather queasy.

Mikado had come to Ikebukuro on the invitation from an old friend. To be more precise, in all his sixteen years, this was in fact his first time in Tokyo.

Mikado had never left his hometown before. Even in elementary and middle school, he had never gone on field trips. And when he started feeling that this was getting a little extreme, he got into a private high school in the Toshima district. It was a fairly new school, and its prestige was above average. Its facilities were excellent and ranked as one of the best in Tokyo. Mikado could have chosen to go to a high school in his hometown, but he chose to come to Tokyo because he'd always dreamed of life in the city and because a good friend in elementary school who had transferred out who had invited him over.

While Mikado was still in elementary school, he already had Internet access at home, so even though his good friend was in a different school, they still kept contact via the Internet. Thus, though they hadn't met for a long time, they were still the best of friends.

Mikado's parents weren't well versed with the Internet, so it was hard for them to understand a long distance friendship like this. So when they heard their son say that he wanted to go to Tokyo to study because 'a good friend who transferred out in elementary school asked me if I wanted to study in a school there', they could hardly accept something like that. Even though they never said it, but it was also because they wanted their son to remain in their hometown and study in a public school. His parents objected to it at first, but after assuring them that he would work and pay for his own living expenses other than school fees in exchange if they let him, he finally convinced them. From spring onwards, he would start his new

life in this new world.

“Easier said than done...”

As he faced the crowds who were effectively ignoring him, Mikado felt a little suffocated. While he understood that he was feeling like this because he was giving things too much thought, but the uneasy fear that he wouldn’t be able to fit in consumed Mikado.

But as Mikado sighed for the fifth time, an unfamiliar voice sounded in his ear.

“Yo Mikado!”

“?!”

Mikado hurriedly raised his head, and saw a teenager with dyed brown hair standing in front of him. The teenager’s features still had a childish quality to them and contrasted strongly to his hair colour and his ear piercings.

In that moment, Mikado jolted with fear at the thought of having already met an extortionist or a fraudster; but then he realised the person had said his name. He studied his face carefully. And finally, Mikado finally found a small resemblance to his good friend.

“Eh? You’re...Kida-kun?”

“Since you’re asking me...then I’ll generously tell you! Please choose from the three choices: One, Kida Masaomi! Two, Kida Masaomi! and three, Kida Masaomi!”

On hearing this, Mikado smiled the first time since his arrival in Ikebukuro.

“Wah, you’re Kida-kun? You’re really Kida-kun?”

“I spent three years thinking up that joke, and you’re just ignoring it...long time no see man!”

“I just chatted with you online yesterday...but honestly, you’ve changed so much, I was shocked! I didn’t expect you to dye your hair! And that joke just now was lame.”

Even if they chatted online every day, it was still impossible for him to know how much Kida had changed in appearance. Even his voice was a little lower. No wonder Mikado couldn’t recognise it at first.

Kida Masaomi grinned sheepishly, and shot back a reply.

“It’s been four years, of course I’d change. It’s because you haven’t changed much at all! You look almost the same as when you were in elementary school...and don’t just casually say my joke was lame!”

As Kida spoke, he stretched out a hand and patted Mikado, who was much more baby-faced than he was, on the head.

“Hey hey don’t do that. Besides, even when we’re chatting online, you’re always cracking lame jokes...”

Mikado shoved his hand away in mock annoyance. Whether it was in elementary school or in the chatroom, it was always Kida leading Mikado by the hand, but Mikado had no problems with such an arrangement

After their greetings, Kida began to head towards the crowd.

"On that note, let's get going! Let's get outta here first. I'm in an unmistakably Go West mood! But that West doesn't refer to the west exit, but the Seibu department exit! I'm a tricky tour guide huh?"

"I see. But, what's the difference between the west exit and the Seibu exit?"

"...Failed again."

As Mikado followed Kida, the fear and unease towards the crowds had subsided considerably. Being guided by a city dweller, and his old friend at that, allowed Mikado's perception of the city to take a hundred and eighty degree turn.

"To put it simply, Ikebukuro's Tobu department is at the west exit, and contrary to that, the Seibu department is at the east exit—ah...how unlucky, after that joke failed, I still have to explain myself...what am I doing?"

"Being stupid?"

"...That's mean you bastard!"

Kida's expression became pained, and then gave a sigh of resignation and said, "Forget it, I'm better than this, so I'll let you off. Anyway, anywhere you want to go?"

"Hm, I think I told you about it online, something to do with Sunshine City?"

"You want to go there now? Hm...I don't mind, but seriously, wouldn't it be better to bring a chick?"

Sunshine City 60 was once famous for being Japan's tallest tower and was a well-known attraction. Even though it has been succeeded by the Tokyo Tower and the Yokohama Landmark Tower, Sunshine City 60 is still a recreational wonderland that continuously draws people. It has an aquarium, a Namjatown amusement park, and thus is a good place for students and families to relax.

Even though Mikado felt that he was blindly succumbing to some trend, he couldn't think of anywhere else. To tell the truth, there was another place which he'd seen very often on television—

"Ah there was the Ikebukuro West Gate Park."

"Oh oh, I've watched that drama. I even have the novel and manga."

"Nah I don't mean the drama, I mean the place! West Gate Park!"

Kida stood dumbfounded, and comprehension dawned on his face as he listened to Mikado. He grinned and said, "No no, it's called the Ikebukuro West Exit Park."

"Eh? But...don't the Ikebukuroers call it the West Gate Park?"

"Ikebukuroers'? What's with that? Anyway, you wanna go?"

As he watched Kida stop in his tracks, Mikado shook his head vigorously. "No...no I don't! It's late and if we go we'd bump into one of those colour gangs (note: Illegal street gangs which wear one kind of colour clothes, hats or scarves ever since the drama 'Ikebukuro West Gate Park' and hang around the West Exit

Park) and get killed!"

"Uh...I don't really know how to react to that. And besides, it's only six pm. Ne, you're still as cowardly as ever."

Kida smiled resignedly and continued leading Mikado through the crowds.

The crowds had thinned out by the time they were out. But still Mikado had a hard time trying not to bump into people.

"There've been fewer sightings of those colour gangs. They were pretty big last year, but after causing a big commotion with the peeps from Saitama, a lot of them got arrested. After that, the police would swoop in on groups wearing the same colour. Although now most of them only come out at night, they won't do anything flashy before the working class people go home...ah but it's another matter altogether when it comes to the Bosokozu and such. Sometimes you'll even see reports about clashes between the Bosokozu and the police in the magazines and the news, but that's mostly in the Kabuki district, hardly in Ikebukuro."

"The Bosokozu?!"

"Nah, like I said, they won't gather at the station at this time."

Mikado let out a sigh of relief on hearing Masaomi's assurance.

"So...now Ikebukuro's pretty safe?"

"Not really. I don't really know everything about stuff like that. Well, there are actually quite a few of these groups. Besides the colour gangs and the Bosokozu, there's still some other dangerous people. They seem pretty normal on the surface, but you must never get involved with them...but you don't really have much to worry. You're not the kind to go around looking for trouble anyway."

Anyway you just have to be careful of those street solicitors and shady merchants and stay away from the gangs and Bosokozu and you'll be fine."

"I see..."

Even though Mikado was still curious about the people he should 'never get involved with', he decided not to ask him more about them.



The two of them entered a narrow underground passage and headed for the escalator.

Mikado looked around and saw a row of posters plastered onto the wall. The posters were advertising all sorts of things, from jewellery stores to movies. There were even posters of girls from some manga.

When they got to the surface via the escalator, it was still as crowded as just now, but their surroundings were totally different.

The place was as crowded as before, and a few people in windbreakers were giving out flyers slipped in packets of tissue paper. Some were only given to women, and some were given to anyone in sight. As for those meant for men, they were only given to men with a specific quality (people like Mikado didn't get one).

There were all kinds of people on the street, working class, young part-timers, high school girls and over foreigners—people of all shape and colours were gathered.

Even so, the people did not mingle fully and the people gathered with those of the same race, as if each group had their own territory. Sometimes someone would visit someone else's territory to call someone out. It was already this dark, yet people kept streaming relentlessly forth.

Kida was already used to all this, but to Mikado, it was a completely new experience. Even in the biggest shopping district in his hometown, he had never seen so many people. The world he had only seen on the Internet and in the mangas had materialised before his very eyes.

When Mikado told Kida how surreal everything felt, Kida laughed and said, “Is that so? Then I'll just take you to Shinjuku or Shibuya the next time. Harajuku's not bad either. You'll get culture shock there! How about Akihabara? But if you want to see real crowds, I'll take you to a horse race.”

“I don't want to go to places like that.”

Just as Mikado was rejecting Kida's suggestions, the two of them had unknowingly reached a large road. Cars zipped across the multi-lane roadway in an endless stream, and there was even a huge highway towering above the entire road.

“That highway is the capital's expressway. Ah that's right, the place we just came from is called the 60-Storey Street. There was also the Sunshine Street, but Cinema Sunshine is on the 60-Storey Street, don't mix them up. Since we're passing by, I should show you around...”

“That's all right, let's do it some other time.”

Although this was what Mikado said, but all the while he'd only noticed the people, completely ignoring the most important part—the city view. If he continued like this, it'd prove quite the challenge for him to get to Sunshine City from the station by himself.

As the two boys waited for the traffic lights to turn green, Masaomi turned back to look back at the way they came, and muttered to himself, “Thank goodness we didn't run into Shizuo or Simon... Yumasaki-san and Karisawa-san are probably at the game centre.”

“Who are they?”

It was very obvious that Masaomi was talking to himself, but on hearing those names, Mikado couldn't help but try to find out.

"Ah! Nothing! Yumasaki-san and Karisawa-san are my friends. Simon and Shizuo are uh—well they're one of the people you should never get involved with I was telling you about. Most people usually won't run into Heiwajima Shizuo, but if you do, the best thing you can do is scram."

From what Masaomi said, Mikado sensed that he didn't really like this 'Shizuo' person. Seeing that Masaomi had no intention of saying more, Mikado decided not to pry—but there was another thing he wanted to ask, and he decided to.

"About the people you said I shouldn't provoke...they all sound like something out of a manga. Who else is there?"

As the child-faced teenager innocently asked this question, Masaomi looked up at the sky, as though deep in thought and finally cried, "The first one would be me!"

"...square root of 3 points."

"Square root?! What's up with the square root?! At least answer with something easier to understand, like minus 20 or something! Wait...are you telling me even elementary school students who don't understand square roots wouldn't understand my jokes? How dare you! I've hardly finished talking and you already backsass me! Since when have your comprehension skills become so bad? Is it the liberal education system? That's what caused you to turn out this way right?!"

"So even such an education system has its flaws."

It was just like old times and Mikado simply went along with Masaomi's lameness. Perhaps it was because Masaomi had realised he was being too lame, but he began answering Mikado's question properly.

"Hm...actually, there are quite a few dangerous people. There's nothing more to say about those hooligans, but the people you're likely to bump into would be the two I've mentioned. Oh and there's Orihara Izaya too. That guy's really dangerous, so don't ever get involved with him. But he's mainly based in Shinjuku, so maybe you won't run into him after all."

"Orihara Izaya...what a weird name."

"You're one to talk," Masaomi chuckled. Mikado had no way of rebutting.

He had a name like Ryuugamine as a surname, and his name, Mikado was considered rather ostentatious. Although it was said that his ancestors were rather distinguished, Mikado's parents were ordinary working class people. It was unclear how much inheritance they had left, but if there still was some left over, they wouldn't have been so unhappy over Mikado's decision to study in a private school.

Perhaps his parents had chosen the name Mikado for him in the hopes that he could grow up to do great things, but it had been a source of endless embarrassment for him in elementary school. His classmates constantly poked fun at his name. But in the end everyone got used to it, and no one made fun of or ostracised him anymore.

But it was a different situation now. In the middle school in his hometown, there was only one class in every year, and everybody knew each other well. He was now in this unfamiliar place, meeting complete strangers. How was he going to prove himself worthy of his name like this?

—Ah, it's impossible...

Maybe it was because Masaomi had sensed Mikado's doubts about himself, because he decided to reassure him. "Like I said...you don't need to care that much. It's a little flashy, but it's a good name. Mikado only

has to perform better, and not let anyone think you're not worthy of your name, and then no one will have anything to say about it.”

“...Ah, thanks.”

No sooner had he finished thanking him, the traffic lights flashed green.

“That's right, there are another group you should avoid...a group called the Dollars. The less you're involved, the better.”

“...Dollars?”

“Yeah, like the ‘derers’ in Wanderers.”

“What's that supposed to mean? What kind of people are they?”

Mikado had been relatively passive with the other topics they'd brought up, but this time, he wanted the details.

“That huh~ Well, I'm not very clear with that, but I've heard they have a lot people and they're not really normal. Rumour has it that they're considered a colour gang, but no one knows what colour they are. Like I said, it's hard for colour gangs to congregate, so they may have unconsciously disbanded due to the lack of order.”

“Ah...”

Mikado was satisfied now. But it was becoming awkward between them for some reason.

The crossed the road silently, and walked towards the big building on the opposite street. The big building appeared very chic and there were several stylish sports cars being displayed in it, which complimented the building's appearance nicely.

Mikado stared at the building and the cars for a little while—then he heard a strange noise.

When he first that sound, he thought it was the caterwaul of some kind of beast. But, if you listened closely, you'd notice that the sound was coming from the large road, from one of the lanes. As the sound rang out for the second time, Mikado decided that it was the sound of an engine. Although it really sound like an animal call, but it came from the road, so it had to be either had to be from a car or van.

Mikado stopped in his tracks and looked up. Masaomi calmly said, “Mikado's really lucky.”

“Eh?”

“I would never have expected that on your first day in Tokyo, you'd be able to see the urban legend with your own eyes.”

Even though Masaomi's face was completely calm, but a light danced in his eyes, and you could see the excitement and anticipation in them.

—So...

Mikado noticed that he'd seen this expression on Masaomi's face before. Like in class, when an airship flew past the school, and that time when a stray cat had wandered onto school grounds. It was the expression that appeared when he saw some insignificant, but extraordinary things.

As Mikado thought of something to say to Masaomi—

That ‘existence’ had appeared before them.

Upon black motorbike with no headlights, rode a human-shaped ‘shadow’.

It sped out from between vehicles—soundlessly cruising past Mikado and Masaomi.

“?!?”

After a few blank seconds, the engine let out another roar. But in the next second, all had lapsed into silence, and only the friction of the tires on the asphalt road could be heard. This silence was usually only heard when the engine was turned off, but the motorcycle didn’t even seem to be slowing down. In fact, it was accelerating.

This was obviously an unnatural existence and reality seemed to be defied wherever that sound fell, giving off an ominous vibe. Half of the people walking on the street paused suddenly, staring after ‘shadow’ incredulously.

Then—Mikado realised he was trembling.

It wasn’t from fear, but it was from a something that was stirring from within his body that was slowly taking over.

—Something he couldn’t see.

At the very instant as the ‘shadow’ was passing, Mikado had glimpsed into the helmet. He couldn’t make out what was inside in the helmet, because the head hadn’t moved the slightest, and it was like there was no one looking out of it either.

It was like—there was nothing inside the helmet.

♂♀

Chatroom (late at night)

—Tanaka Taro has entered the chatroom—

【Good evening.】

[Evening~]

【Ah~it’s Setton-san! I saw it today!】

【The black bike!】

[? Tanaka Taro-san, you’re in Ikebukuro?]

【Yeah, well actually I’m living in Ikebukuro from today onwards. I’m in my friend’s house now, but I’m moving into an apartment near the station tomorrow. I’ve signed up for an ISP, so I’ll be able to go online immediately.】

[I see, congratulations then. Are you living alone?]

【Yeah.】

[Ah...hey, you said you saw the black biker. Was it around seven at night just now?]

【Hey you saw it too? I saw it near Sunshine City.】

[I knew about it, because I was there too.]

【?!】

【Really? Uwa...then we might have passed each other without knowing!】

[Maybe.]

【Uwa! If I'd known, I'd have told you first!】

[Anyway, welcome to Ikebukuro. If you have anything you want to ask me, just shoot.]

【Thanks! Thanks!】

【Ah, then I'll just start asking...】

[Go on, go on.]

【Do you know someone named Orihara Izaya?】

【I asked my friend, but he told me that it's best if I don't get near him.】

【Is that person really that scary? Hm, you probably won't know right? Sorry..】

[Tanaka Taro-san, does your friend have underground ties or something?]

【Nah, he's just a normal guy.】

[Ah I see. Well, sorry, but concerning Orihara Izaya, the less you know, the better. That person is trouble.]

《Ah! Tanaka-san, good evening~》

【?! Kanra-san, you're here?】

《I was on the phone. Ah, I just saw the chat log. So you're in Tokyo? Congratulations! Let's have an offline meeting sometime then.》

【Don't bother if you're busy. But, an offline meeting does sound nice.】

《Yeah!》

《Ah, that's right, speaking of offline meetings, weren't there some cases of online suicide pacts?》

[Oh~]

[I think it was all the rage last year. Some people and others they met online organised this mass suicide pact.]

【How morbid.】

【But, there hasn't been much mention of it on the news.】

[It's probably calmed down, or maybe it's become so frequent it's no longer newsworthy.]

《Not necessarily. Alternatively it's still ongoing, only no one's noticed yet!》

【Eh?】

《Or maybe it's because they never find the bodies.》

【Uwa~】

[You shouldn't say things like that.]

《Anyway, there were quite a few cases of people disappearing lately eh.》

【? I've never heard news reports of that...】

《Eh...the victims are mostly illegal immigrants or runaway kids from the countryside. I heard it's especially common from Ikebukuro to Shibuya~ and there are some even people who say that the Dollars are the ones behind it and that they eat them up afterwards. He he he~》

【Ah, it seems the Dollars are pretty famous.】

《The Dollars are awesome! I hear they have ties to the Chinese mafia. And there was the gang member stabbing incident...I heard that was the doing of one of the Dollars underlings!》

[Kanra-san, where did you hear all that from?]

《Because I know a few people in that field.》

【Oh oh, I really want to hear more, but I have to get up early tomorrow, we'll stop here for today then~】

《Oh, sleep early then!》

[Goodnight Tanaka Taro-san~]

[Ah I have something to do too, so I'll stop here tonight too~]

【Sorry...ah ah, tell me about Dotachin next time OK?】

【Bye bye~】

『Ah we'll just stop here today. There's no one else anyway.』

『Goodnight everyone ☆』

—Tanaka Taro-san has left the chatroom—

—Setton-san has left the chatroom—

—Kanra-san has left the chatroom—



第二章

# 首なしライダー 主観

chapter 3

# Chapter 3: The Headless Rider: Own Perspective

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National Highway No. 254 (Kawagoe Highway)

—I've had enough.

The motorbike cruised down the highway. And the black bike's owner, the headless rider, was visibly irritated.

The job this time had been simple. Who knew by showing a little mercy to a hoodlum would result in him being hit by a car? Perhaps if she'd known this earlier, she'd have just killed him.

As the headless rider thought about her 'work' performance today, she started to slow her bike down.

With hand signals instead of her blinker, she turned into a narrow lane and stopped at an apartment building by the main road. The headless rider looked like she might've simply intended to leave her motorcycle in front of the garage. But instead, after dismounting, she began tenderly stroked the handle of the motorbike.

Next, the engine of the motorcycle purred gently, and wheeled into the garage by itself.

The headless rider watched her beloved motorcycle enter the carpark, and then strode towards the condominium.

"Yo, tired huh?"

A young man in a white labcoat who looked to be in his twenties had come out to meet her as she stepped into the top floor of the condominium. He was wearing a labcoat, but there wasn't any sign of medical equipment in the apartment. Standing in an apartment filled with high-end furniture and the latest electronics, this young man looked rather out of place.

The 'shadow' wearing a biker's suit was similarly out of place. Irritably, she stalked into the apartment.

"My, my you seem a little irritated. This won't do. You need more calcium."

As the white-coated man said this, he strode to the computer desk in the corner and pulled out a chair. He had just sat down to face the computer screen when he heard the sound of someone typing on a keyboard.

And as he heard this sound, a string of words had jumped out on the computer screen. It looked like they were using some kind of networking site to connect two computers that allowed them to have an exchange like this.

Are you telling me to eat eggshells?

"Eh, that'd work right? But I'm not a nutritionist and I don't know how much calcium eggshells contain, nor do I know how easily the body absorbs calcium from eggshells. But since you don't have a brain at all, I highly doubt that calcium will be of any benefit to you. Besides, where do you eat from?"

The white-coated man wasn't typing, but was shouting those words in the direction of the headless rider in the inner room. She didn't find this strange and typed rapidly.

Shut up.

So this was how the white-coated man communicated with the headless rider and the two of them had easily struck up a 'conversation'.

"Fine, fine I'll shut up. But I have another question. If we humans spend too long staring at the computer screen, our eyesight will gradually deteriorate and we won't be able to see properly anymore. Will yours be like that?"

Who knows.

"Ne, Celty...just how does someone like you with no eye see the world? I've asked you so many times...just tell me won't you?"

I can't tell you something I don't understand myself.

The shadow that the white-coated man had called 'Celty' was 'headless'. This meant that she shouldn't have any sense organs and thus had no senses.

Yet Celty's world still existed with sight, sound and even smell. She could see the words on the computer screen and was perfectly capable of differentiating between different colours. Yet, her field of vision was a little wider than humans. If she could have seen in all directions, she wouldn't have been knocked down by that hoodlum's car.

Actually, her vision started from around the area where her head should be and she could move it to any part of her body. However, she would never be able to see herself aerially.

Celty wasn't clear about how her body was built. She didn't know how humans viewed the world, so even if she wanted to tell the white-coated man about the differences in their perception, she wouldn't know where to start anyway.

Celty hadn't typed a single word, so as though he was helping her, Shinra stated his opinion on the matter:

"This is only my hypothesis, but—I think the key is that sci-fi-ish 'shadow' matter spewing out of your body. Although it's never been proven in any way and it's not a really sound argument...but my guess is that instead of reflecting light, those shadow particles released are bouncing off things in your environment. Which is the say, the shadow relays information to you about your surroundings. And this information is not only visual in nature, but also includes sound, smell etc, very much like a radar. Logically speaking, with objects that are further away, the information received won't be as clear. Or maybe, it's because the shadow from your body has sensory abilities and is able to absorb light, sound waves and smell and so on."

You make things so confusing, it irritates me. And besides I don't really care about it. I'm content as long as I can see and hear.

As he read the indifferent reply, the white-coated man shrugged exaggeratedly:

"Celty, you're always like that. I just really want to know how different the world you and I see really are. This isn't a question of senses as much it is a question of morals. But what I want to know isn't the values

humans have—”

The man paused here and placed an emphasis on the preceding words as if taunting her:

“—But those of the one and only supernatural entity that exists here at the moment—the world the headless rider sees.”

Celty Sturluson was not human.

She was known as the ‘headless rider’, a Dullahan, and was a kind of death faerie that visited those about to die and brought them the news of their impending deaths.

The headless rider held his decapitated head in the crook of his arm and rode in a Coiste bodhar, a two wheeled carriage pulled by a headless horse and visited the homes of those who were going to die. And if they unwittingly opened the door, the headless rider would greet them with a full bucket of blood in their faces—Together with the banshee (note: In Irish folklore, the banshee is a demon who screeches to inform one of his imminent demise), the headless rider was one of the symbols and harbingers of doom in European mythology.

The legend of the headless rider had never existed in Japan, but recently, after all the fantasy novels and video games being published and made about it, its popularity skyrocketed. The headless rider was the very symbol of ill fortune and doom and thus usually was portrayed as the villain.

And among the youngsters—especially the group who loved video games and thrillers, ‘the terrible ghost rider’ had been an instant hit.

But the reason Celty had left the birthplace of the legend—from Ireland to Japan, had absolutely nothing to do with that.

How she had been born and how she had died, why she had to throw buckets of blood at people, why she had to inform people of their impending deaths—Celty had absolutely no idea.

Thus, to find the answers to these questions, Celty had travelled to this faraway island country.

Twenty years ago, Celty had awoken on a mountain, and realised she was missing a lot of memories. She had no memory of where she was going or anything about the period of time before this for that matter—she only knew that she was a Dullahan, that her name was Celty Sturluson and how to use her powers. Then, she found that a headless horse was pressing gently against her body. She was stroking the horse’s back when she suddenly realized—her head was gone.

But what shocked Celty the most at first was: “So I wasn’t using my brain to think just now?!” Then she began to feel a faint presence and decided that it could be very well be her ‘head’.

After thinking it through, Celty reached a possible conclusion. Her memories had been maintained within her ‘body’ and her ‘head’. So the missing memories were most likely contained in her ‘head’.

So Celty made a decision. To find out the reason for her existence, she would have to find her head, and this would be her reason for existence as of now. Unless, it was because her ‘head’ had chosen to leave her body. But then again, she could only know for sure if she found her head.

Guided by the lingering ‘presence’ she felt, Celty relentlessly searched for her head, and later found out that her head was being shipped across the ocean on a ship. She quickly discovered the ship’s destination.

And in order to go the same way—Japan, she decided to secretly stow away on another ship—but what about her horse and coach?

The headless rider's spirit familiar was in fact sealed into the corpse of a horse and a carriage by magic, and when needed, could be summoned. But after calling it out, where would it go? Unfortunately, this knowledge seemed to be residing in 'head'. She knew how to call it out, there was still the problem of where it would go after that and thus, Celty hadn't dared to try. Still brooding over the matter, she wandered over to a nearby scrap heap.

And there, Celty found the perfect thing. It was like a union of a horse and a carriage. It was a black motorbike without headlights.

Then she'd come to Japan. But over these twenty years, she had failed to find a single lead.

She could still feel the presence, but it was like a delicately faint aroma. Just by following this presence, she'd managed to get an idea of roughly where her head was, but not exactly where it was.

—But I know it's definitely somewhere in Tokyo—

Celty could only grit her teeth (inwardly anyway) and continue searching for her head.

Even if it would take a few years, ten years, Celty would never doubt it. The limited memories she had now dated back a hundred years ago, so she was sure her 'head' held more memories of an even earlier time.

Taking this into account, she assumed she still had a lot of time left. But, once she thought about how she had no clue where her head was, she knew she couldn't just kick back and relax in her search.

So today, Celty had ridden her bike and traversed Tokyo's darkness.

And at the same time, it was for her job—a courier.

"So did you complete your work sedulously today?"

Using unfamiliar vocabulary, the white-coated man—Kishitani Shinra asked casually.

Shinra was one of the only people who knew Celty's true identity, and provided Celty who had no other home to go to with a place to stay, and helped her get all sorts of 'jobs' to help her pay off the rent.

On Celty's discreet voyage to Japan, Shinra and his father, who was a doctor had been aboard the same ship and had discovered Celty halfway during the trip. Then, Shinra's father had suggested with a pen and paper:

"Let me dissect you, just once. And if you let me, I'll give you a place to stay."

Shinra's father was different from most people, and didn't feel fear at strange beings he didn't understand, and was even able to negotiate with them.

And even the dissection wasn't to show off his findings in the medical field, and was purely to satisfy his curiosity pertaining to this 'new species' of organism. Celty later heard that had her regenerative powers had been most impressive. Before the dissection had even ended, her wounds had already begun healing.

But Celty didn't have much of an idea concerning this matter.

The worst part was the trauma she'd received from the dissection. She had been given a dose of anaesthetic, but apparently human anaesthetic didn't have much of an effect on her. She had felt very lucidly, the agony of being sliced open. But her arms and legs had been cuffed securely and she couldn't struggle. Then in the middle of the dissection, she had fainted. But when she awoke, she realised that her memory had become rather fuzzy.

"It looks like you can feel pain, but your sense of it is much duller than a human's. A normal person would have been driven insane from it."

Shinra's father had said that right after the operation ended. Perhaps it was because of her fuzzy memory, but Celty hadn't had the strength to get angry at him.

Celty told herself, she had been able to stand up even after being knocked down by a car so she must be pretty robust. And in the middle of these thoughts, she turned towards Shinra.

That day when Shinra's father had been dissecting her, he'd let Shinra stand in a corner and watch. He even let a child who was barely five hold a scalpel—and let him slice open flesh that was so much like a human's.

Ever since that, Celty had predicted that with a father like that, Shinra would never grow up to be a proper adult—and indeed, he didn't turn out to be a very respectable one.

Twenty four year old Shinra was a self proclaimed 'underground doctor' and treated some rather unconventional ailments—from gunshot wounds to people who couldn't openly go for plastic surgery. These made up the bulk of his jobs. And as he was young (legally speaking, he too young to be a surgeon) and was rather talented, he was trusted by his patients; but all that was what he'd told her, so Celty couldn't be sure about that.

Normally, even if he had a license to practise medicine and if he wanted to practise surgery, he'd have to have a senior doctor to assist him so as to help him gain experience. But from what Celty knew, Shinra had been his father's illegal assistant since he was young and he had been beyond such regulations a long time ago.

Like father, like son.

Even after Shinra had graduated high school, he'd never had a shred of doubt about his circumstances.

Someone like him, had asked her, who had just come home from a diligent day of work, a question like that.

It pissed me off.

After relaying that acidic remark, Celty began to recount what had transpired during the night's 'job'. Words flew out endlessly across the computer screen.

Today's job had been a little different. It was a job Shinra had suddenly thrown at her in the middle of the night.

Apparently, a member of one of the groups formed by youngsters in Ikebukuro had been kidnapped. The case was originally meant to be left to the police, but perhaps it was too pressing a matter and the message had been relayed directly via email to her cellphone.

The perpetrators were the underlings of the underlings of the underlings of an immoral business, and

specialised in kidnapping. Their job scope merely comprised of kidnapping illegal immigrants and runaway teenagers and handing them over to a higher up. But no one had any idea what their motives were. There was a high probability that it was to use these ‘humans’ as materials for a variety of work.

Perhaps it was to hand them over to the superior’s superior’s superior for some kind of human experimentation, or it was because the superior’s superior’s superior wanted to engage the victims in some unethical trade; or even purely because the superior’s company wanted to sell them for some money or to use them as low-wage workers.

Regardless of the goal, the fact that the illegal immigrant friend of the group of youngsters had been kidnapped remained. The fact that he was an illegal immigrant was another issue, but to Celty who had neither face nor a census, she could only accept such a job.

After giving those kidnappers a good beating, she’d opened the van and made sure the victims were safe. Then she’d sent an email to Shinra, and thus ended her job. Shinra would most likely contact that group to wrap things up. As for the unconscious kidnappers, she never heard from them again.

Then again, couldn’t Shinra just disclose the kidnappers’ location to those youngsters and let them rescue their friend themselves?—that was what Celty had originally thought. But Shinra wanted to ‘tone things down a little’ and she ended up with the job. It was probably more efficient to get a professional to handle this, instead of letting it escalate into a huge brawl between the two sides.

And the end-result was her getting hit by a car. To avenge herself, Celty had used the huge scythe made of shadows to teach them a lesson they wouldn’t forget in a hurry and beat them to an inch of their lives.

Celty’s body was continuously ‘wreathed in shadow’. The shadow sometimes took the form of armour and, whenever she wanted to, could will it to become the biker suit or a simple weapon.

Although it was rather strange to talk about the shadows having mass, but they were in fact very light and thus could do extraordinary things that only appeared in movies. On the flipside, because it was practically weightless, the strength of the weapons formed from it depended totally on Celty.

But if it was in the form of a blade, its sharpness was not inferior to real weapons; its hardness was never measured in detail, but Celty could never remember a time when her ‘shadow’ had failed her. If she were to describe her blade, she would say that it was like a box cutter which had a blade which would never dull and blown up to about the same size as Japanese sword and weighed exactly the same.

The shadow wasn’t useful as a blunt weapon, but as a blade, its strength was unparalleled.

But Celty had never meant to slash those hoodlums, and had only used the scythe to deliver a blow to their necks and knock them out. Hundreds of years before, Celty had been something that instilled terror and fear in humans and she even remembered several occasions when she crossed blades with humans; but at any rate she knew that fighting and killing in modern Japan was a no go.

In the twenty years she spent in Japan, she had not only learnt Japanese, but had also been training herself to take down enemies without killing them. To do this quickly, the best way would be to have learnt Aikido at a dojo, self defence or trained in karate, but the neighbouring dojos refused to let anyone train whilst wearing a helmet, so that idea had quickly been put to rest.

Perhaps classifying the scythe as a weapon wasn’t too accurate. As most people had an extremely negative impression of things like the Grim Reaper, they would assume that a huge scythe was an exceedingly lethal weapon when it was harder to use than guns and swords.

But then why use the scythe? In actuality, it was because Shinra had suggested it, saying that “it would be easier for you to publicise yourself.”

And the worst part was—even though it was only a little, Celty had recently realised she was beginning to like the shape of the scythe. But no matter how strong a weapon one had, it was all over when they were knocked down. Although the pain had long subsided, irritation still lingered inside her at the memory of her blunder.

She wondered how severe her injuries had to be before could died. She hadn’t managed to find out, and had no intention of doing so whatsoever. Celty couldn’t keep these thoughts to herself, and so she included it in its entirety in her work report.

On hearing how she had been hit by car, Shinra grinned and said, “It’s been hard on you. You must be tired. But I still have something to tell you...”

What is it?

“It has something to do with the job you did. The reason I could find out the location of the kidnappers was entirely thanks to Orihara-kun.”

Orihara Izaya was an information broker based in Shinjuku. He could provide you all kinds of information, but for an exorbitant price. It was rumoured that this wasn’t even his main job and it was anyone’s guess what he did behind the scenes.

Celty had received several job requests from him, and as long as they from him, they always left a bad aftertaste. Honestly speaking, he was someone who made people think twice about getting involved with.

Why did you ask him?

“No reason really. It was because he happened to be enlisting my services, so I just asked for some information about that in exchange. After giving me the license plate number, he immediately told me about the carpark.”

After hearing that, Celty gritted her teeth inwardly. It was strange. Even though she didn’t have a head, she still knew the feeling of gritting her teeth vividly.

As Celty thought about which part of body these feelings were manifesting from, Shinra’s hands suddenly landed on her shoulders. He had probably come in the room when she was still mulling things over.

“Ne, make your decision already.”

What decision?

As he read the words that had appeared on the screen, Shinra couldn’t help but grin.

“You know what I’m talking about.”

Without waiting for Celty to finish typing, Shinra went on, “You are an otherworldly, supernatural entity. But frankly speaking, even if you are and go on like this, I’m afraid the possibility of you realising your dream will be extremely remote.”

What are you on about?

"Let me put it simply. Give. It. Up."

The clattering of the keyboard stopped suddenly, and a most peculiar silence enshrouded the room.

"Stop looking for your head and the two of us can go somewhere else. Anywhere is fine. If you want to go home, I'll be much obliged to take you. I'll go with you and we can stay there together forever—"

When Shinra stopped using bombastic vocabulary, it was a sign that he was being extremely serious.

I've said it before, I've never thought of giving up.

"A long time ago, there were many folktales and myths about how a headless being was searching for its head, and so I thought, there must have been some fellows who were like you. Like in that Sleepy Hollow legend made into a movie, there was someone like you in the eighteenth century. It could even very well be you, and you just don't remember it."

In response to the whole bunch of things Shinra had just rattled off, Celty answered patiently

I think I would have had better things to do than kidnap unattractive schoolteachers.

"You only read the original novel..."

Celty began typing furiously and shoved Shinra's hands off her shoulders.

I don't hate you, but I'm happy with my life as it is.

Seeing her indifferent reply, Shinra sighed softly and mumbled under his breath.

"Even so, you should try being a little more 'feminine'..."

In that instant, there was a temporary blank, the stark contrast of hot and cold seemed to form a wall that split the air between them.

Enough. I'm going to take a shower.

In the steam-filled bathroom, Celty was bathing alone. A well endowed chest, a taut stomach—her body was like that of a model. But she didn't have a head, which seemed rather strange.

Celty slipped her fingers dripping in body wash across her silk smooth skin and noticed the image in the mirror.

A headless girl lathering her body with soap—

It was a strange sight, but to her, it was perfectly normal.

When she was still in Ireland, she had never showered before. But after coming to Japan, it had gradually developed into a habit. Dirt, sweat or grime couldn't really accumulate on her body...but when she thought of how a shower could wash away the dust on her body and make it clean, showering became something Celty couldn't live without.

—Maybe this shows...humans and I do share the same values.

To be honest, being a headless rider, Celty had always wondered how similar her values were to that of a human. When she first arrived in Japan, she had been rather uncomfortable with a lot of things, but now she had been heavily influenced by the Japanese.

Recently, she had felt a kind of attraction to Shinra. The kind that a woman felt towards a man. At first, she hadn't understood what it was, but then as time passed, she slowly began to understand.

—Ah...so this is how it feels to fall in love.

But even so, it didn't mean she was becoming a pubescent girl, so such things didn't have a large impact on her life.

But she realised, whenever they watched television and they laughed together at the same parts, she would feel a little happier.

—I share the same values as humans, I have a heart like that of a human and I can connect with humans through feelings—

That must be it.

At least, that was what she believed.

**第四章**

**街の日常  
居**



# Chapter 4: Everyday in the City—Day

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Raira Academy was located in South Ikebukuro and was a coeducational private high school.

The school grounds weren't extensive, but due to strategic design, the best was made out of the limited land and students never felt that the school was too small. And as the school was near the Ikebukuro Station, it was convenient for students living in the suburbs of Tokyo to come to school and thus recently the applicants for the school entrance exam had been steadily increasing. Also because the school enrolment was slowly increasing each year, it was getting harder and harder to get into the school, so it could be said that Mikado and the others had got in at just the right time.

The tall school building gave the students a magnificent view of the scenery below, but was significantly dwarfed in comparison to the sixty storey building standing before them. And behind the school was the huge Zoshigaya Cemetery which even though was located in the heart of the area still retained a sombre atmosphere.

After the school entrance ceremony had ended, Mikado and Masaomi returned to their respective classes, for a simple class meeting.

"My name is Ryuugamine Mikado, pleased to meet you."

As the self-introductions were underway, Mikado had been constantly worrying whether people would make fun of his name, but even after introducing himself, no one really seemed to care. These youngsters who were the same age as Mikado didn't seem to be very interested in people's names.

On the contrary, Mikado was in fact rather curious about the others and listened intently to the self-introductions of his other classmates. Some of them liked to crack a joke or two after introducing themselves, and there were people who sat down immediately after stating their names and some of them had long fallen asleep on their desks. But among all these people, the person who had caught Mikado's attention was in fact a pretty girl named Sonohara Anri. She was petite, more so than the other girls, wore glasses and she was fair-skinned. But the vibe she gave off seemed to be repelling others and rejecting their approaches, one that was tough and weathered.

"My name is Sonohara Anri."

Her voice was soft and nearly inaudible but it rang as clearly as a bell in Mikado's ears. She made quite an impression on Mikado as the aura she exuded was one of fresh refinement. Everyone else could merely be called 'ordinary high school students.' None of them looked like model students and there weren't bad boys around either.

Besides Sonohara, another thing that had aroused his curiosity was the fact that someone was absent. It was a girl called Harima Mika. Then Mikado thought it might be probably because of a cold or something and quickly brushed the matter aside.

But when the teacher mentioned her absence, Mikado noticed that Sonohara Anri had turned her head to look at the empty seat, and an uneasy expression crossed her face.

Class ended uneventfully, and Mikado met up Masaomi who had been assigned the neighbouring class outside.

Masaomi's earrings were rather ostentatious, but they didn't stand out much in the crowd. Or perhaps it was because this high school allowed the students to dress casually and it was Mikado who was out of place. As today was the school entrance ceremony, both of them wore their school blazers. But even so, it was hard for others to tell that they were students from the same school.

"Ah I wasted a day yesterday helping you move and setting up your modem. And today I'm taking you somewhere fun, so you have to treat me!"

Mikado didn't have a reason to reject Masaomi's request, and obediently followed him. It wasn't time for the club exhibitions yet where people tried pulling in new students to join, so they left the school easily.

After leaving the school, they turned and caught sight of Sunshine City 60 and headed downtown.

To Mikado, Ikebukuro was an amazing place. The two big roads of the same size separated only by a street, seemed to be completely different places. The fact that every road was interwoven with their own unique backgrounds made Mikado feel extremely confused and lost each time he walked down a new, unfamiliar street,

"You wanna go anywhere?"

"Um, I was thinking...where's the bookstore?"

Mikado wanted to know this as he stood outside a fast food outlet around the entrance of 60-Storey Street. Masaomi thought for a while and answered.

"Hm, bookstore huh? Then you'd want to go to Junkudo. It's just around here...what books do you wanna buy?"

"Um...I think some mangas so I can pass the time at home..."

On hearing Mikado's reply, Masaomi gently stepped forward.

"In that case, let's go to the store in the back that has this amazing collection of manga!"

Masaomi walked to a crossroad with a gaming centre and turned right and entered an unfamiliar street which was completely different from 60-Storey Street, and Mikado thought he might be lost.

It was hard enough for Mikado to return to his apartment from the station, so he really felt that if he were to wind up in some alley, he might never be able to get out alone.

"They're selling doujinshis there too."

Doujinshis—although Mikado spent so much time on the Net, he had absolutely no understanding on this subject, and he'd never bought any before. Back in junior high, he remembered seeing a few of his female classmates discussing it enthusiastically. And add in the information he got from the Web, Mikado had equated doujinshis as an '18+' thing.

"Then...then, can I still go? Won't I get chased out?"

"Huh?"

As Masaomi fretted over the illogical and laughable things Mikado had just said, someone called out to him from behind.

"If it isn't Kida-kun?"

"Hyayaya, long time no see."

"Ah~it's Karisawa-san and Yumasaki-san! Long time no see."

Mikado turned and saw a duo of a boy and girl. They obviously went gallivanting about in the day, but their skin remained strangely pasty. The boy was sharp-eyed, skinny and he was carrying a heavy-looking hiker's backpack. But looking at his clothes, he didn't seem to be on a camping trip.

As Mikado studied them, the girl asked Kida, "This is...your friend?"

"Ah~he's my childhood friend, and as of today, he's my high school schoolmate."

"Oh, so you started high school today! Congratulations."

After the two of them finished their rather irrelevant chat, Masaomi introduced them to Mikado.

"The girl's Karisawa-san and the other guy is Yumasaki-san."

"...Ah, that, I'm...I'm Ryuugamine Mikado."

On hearing Mikado's name, the boy called Yumasaki cocked his head to one side. The way he did it was extremely unnatural, and made Mikado feel a little uneasy. But for some reason, Yumasaki asked Karisawa, "Is that a pen name?"

"Why would a high school student use a pen name? Ah...aha! You use it in radio shows and magazines right?"

"Uh...that...actually, it's my real name..."

Mikado corrected them in an almost inaudible voice, and caused them to stare at him in wide-eyed wonderment.

"Really? Your real name?!"

"Hyaya, that's great! It's too cool! Hyayaya, like the name of the male protagonist of a manga!"

After seeing Karisawa and Yumasaki's reactions—

"Don't put it like that...how embarrassing."

"Kida-kun, you shouldn't be the one who's embarrassed."

It was obvious to Mikado that he had become the main topic of the conversation, but yet he didn't say a word. He didn't really know what to do, so he just stood there. After a while, Yumasaki finally sensed that something was amiss so he pulled out his cellphone to look at the time and mumbled., "Hyayaya, so sorry to have kept you here for so long. You guys have anything else to do?"

"Not really, nothing important..."

He never expected for them to be concerned about him. As such Mikado was a little stunned and hurriedly shook his head and then answered with that.

"Hyayaya, that's fine. Go ahead and do what you need. Really sorry, Kida, to have held you back here."

"We're going to the arcade. You guys going to buy stuff?"

"Yeah, some mangas."

After Kida finished talking, Yumasaki raised a hand and patted the backpack he strung on his shoulders a few times.

"Hyayaya, we were just there. Dengeki Bunko just released some books, so we got a whole lot. About thirty in all."

Mikado had heard about Dengeki Bunko before. Dengeki Bunko mainly released light novels and if he wasn't wrong they also published some Hollywood film novel translations. Mikado had bought a few back in junior high, but even so, his total purchases weren't even close to thirty.

"Dengeki Bunko released that many books a month?"

On hearing Mikado's query, Karisawa laughed and answered, "Of course not! We only picked about ten books. One for me, one for him and the one to use tonight, ten books for each so it became thirty."

"There was the 'Moeru Keisan Mondaishuu'<sup>1</sup>, or simply 'Moe-san'. Hyaya, and they were autographed by Jubi Shimamoto!"

He couldn't understand a word Yumasaki was saying so he looked pleadingly at Masaomi.

"...Just imagine they're chanting incantations and just listen. He's the kind of person who thinks that just because he knows something, everyone else must know it as well."

As Masaomi whispered that into Mikado's ear, Yumasaki was still going on and on about that topic which Mikado had no idea about. Karisawa noticed the awkwardness of the situation and patted her companion's bagpack lightly.

"Why are you telling this to them? Well, we should get going. Bye bye."

The duo went off quickly, and Mikado stared after them, looking utterly bewildered and murmured to himself.

"Dengeki Bunko...to use tonight...?"

Though Mikado really wanted to know what they were going to use it for, they had already started to go, and he didn't want to trouble them any further, so he didn't ask. So Mikado and Masaomi started towards the bookstore.

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<sup>1</sup> Moeru Keisan Mondaishuu/Moesan: (credits to anni\_fiesta) Literally means 'The Moe-Moe Problem Book/MoeProb'. It's a parody of Moeru Eitango/Moetan, literally 'The Moe-Moe Vocabulary Book/MoeVocab', the first moe type utility book written for otakus.

"Wow! Look at all the mangas! Super cool! This store called Toranoana...in here, there are way more mangas in here than all the books in the bookstore back home. And I'm talking about just the mangas here!"

"Yeah, there are loads of other places selling lots of manga. Like animate, Comic Plaza and so on. If you want other kinds of books then you should go to Junkudo. It's a huge nine-storey building, and it just sells books."

After buying what they wanted, the two of them walked down 60-Storey Street in the direction of Sunshine City.

"But, I never knew Kida-kun knew people like that."

"Are you talking about Karisawa-san and the others? Well, you don't think I'd only know those people with dyed hair, piercings and sniffed glue right? Well honestly, they're a little strange, but if you're nice to them, you'll find that they're good people."

"Eh? I see..."

Although Mikado thought that a little strange, but he didn't really want to question him, and just brushed it aside.

"Oh yeah. I get out a lot, so I can take you to all kinds of stores, like some selling cheap second hand clothes. Even nightclubs and hotels. And if you ever want to haggle with those roadside stall owners selling little trinkets, I'm your man."

"You really do know everything."

"Cos if I know a little of everything, then I can talk to girls!"

"What sinister motives..."

Mikado couldn't help but say that about Masaomi. Masaomi nodded, seeming very pleased with himself.

Mikado had decided that he'd fully appreciate the view down the road, so he kept reminding himself to look up as he walked.

The most striking things on 60-Storey Street had to be the gigantic electronic billboard mounted on the Cinema Sunshine building, as well as the walls that were plastered with movie posters beside Cinema Sunshine. Mikado had thought at first that the posters were printed, but he heard that they had been painstakingly hand copied and coloured from photographs, and he couldn't help feel rather impressed.

As he observed his surroundings with interest, he decided to see if there were any fun stores around, he suddenly realised something even more attention-grabbing than the big building.

"Eh?"

Mikado saw a black man touting on the street. This wasn't uncommon on 60-Storey Street—the strange thing was his appearance. This black man was almost over two metres tall, and he had muscles as beefy as a professional wrestler. And the most striking feature of the black man was his clothes. He was dressed as a Japanese sushi chef and was touting on the street.

As Mikado stared at him with his mouth agape, the big man suddenly faced him.

“Long time no see, young sir.”

“Eh?!?!”

Mikado had just met this person, but he was acting if they'd known each other for a long time. Mikado didn't really know how to react. Did this mean that his smooth-sailing life in Tokyo was drawing to a close? As Mikado started feeling rather troubled—

“Simon, long time no see! How you've been?”

Masaomi's words allayed Mikado's fears and the attention of the other man had turned to him.

“Yo, Kida, eat sushi? I'll give you a discount, eat sushi OK?”

“Oh, I don't have any money on me right now. I'm in high school now, so wait until I get a job. Then you have to give me a treat!”

“Oh, no. If I let you eat for free, I'll turn into the seaweed plains of Russia.”

“Seaweed on land huh?”

The two of them chatted lightheartedly, and as the conversation ended, he bid the man goodbye and left. Mikado hurriedly followed, and turned back to look. The strong man called Simon was not only waving to Masaomi, but to himself as well. Mikado was at a loss; so he just nodded apologetically and continued walking forward.

“Was the guy just now a friend of Masaomi's?”

“Yeah. He's called Simon, he's a black Russian and he works as a tout for the Russian sushi place.”

—Black Russian?

“Sorry, should I be laughing?”

“No, I'm not kidding. His name is actually Seymon, but everybody calls him Simon like in English, so he's Simon. I heard his parents were American immigrants to Russia, but I don't know the details. Then, because he had a Russian friend who'd opened a sushi restaurant here, he decided to help him pull in customers.”

It sounded like something made-up, but Masaomi didn't look like he was lying, so it was probably true. As Mikado listened, rather intrigued, Masaomi added in, “He's not someone you should cross. There was this time when he stopped a fight—he pulled apart two guys who were as big as he was with his bare hands. And there are people who say they've seen him break a telephone pole in half!”

On hearing that, Mikado thought of Simon's body which in fact very much resembled a tank, and he broke out in cold sweat.

As they strode down a small road, Mikado suddenly uttered, “Amazing...”

“Huh? What's amazing?”

"No, it's just, Kida-kun sure gets around..."

To Masaomi, Mikado's genuine words of praise sounded like some kind of joke. He laughed hollowly a few times. He yawned and said indifferently, "Flattery isn't going to get you anywhere."

"I'm telling the truth!"

In actuality, Mikado really did respect Masaomi. If he'd come to Ikebukuro alone, he wouldn't have known what do and would only be able to wander the streets aimlessly. Mikado did not think that it was his environment that had made Masaomi what he was today. Ever since elementary school, Masaomi had a special charm which made him attractive to many people, and coupled with his fearlessness, he could practically do anything.

He'd been here for only a few days, but he had already been won over by Masaomi and this place. And at that thought, Mikado conceived a wish, and it was to be able to be like Masaomi one day.

The main reason Mikado came to Tokyo, was in fact to rid himself of a normal life. He was always searching for a 'new him', searching within himself. Perhaps it was because he hadn't given it much thought, but in this place, 'extraordinary' things like those out of television or manga would happen, and he might even be caught up in them.

But Mikado didn't want to be anyone famous or notable, and merely wanted to know what it was like to live differently. Mikado didn't notice it, but the moment he had stepped on this soil, within the unease inside him, there was also a soaring joy dancing, and the two emotions, were tumultuously roiling in him, one after the other.

And today, before his very eyes, there was someone who was basking in such joy, a perfect natural in a place like this. Masaomi was only sixteen, but he had seamlessly integrated into this place.

He saw everything he wanted to be in his best friend, and the unease and excitement of being in a place like this was slowly subsiding—like it should.

And then, in the next second—

His resolutions and his emotions once again fell into chaos, as another wave of foreboding and anticipation crashed down.

"Yo."

It was a rather hearty greeting. The voice was clear, with not a trace of obscurity, as if the sky was saying hello, and extremely refreshing.

It was such a bright greeting, but the moment Masaomi heard the voice, his expression changed into that looked as if ten million arrows had lodged themselves into his back. He momentarily broke into a bout of sticky, cold sweat. gingerly, he turned in the direction of the voice.

On seeing Masaomi's reaction, Mikado followed and turned too. He saw a sprightly young man. His features were delicate, yet he gave off an air of hardened maturity and competency, or more aptly, he appeared 'dignified'. His gentle irises seemed to be able to accommodate everything, and seemed to be exuding all sorts of emotions. Coupled with his attire, he looked like someone with quite the personality, and yet there was nothing particularly alarming about him. In fact, he gave off an air of uncertainty.

It was hard to judge how old he was from his appearance and Mikado could only estimate to be a little over twenty, but he was unable to confirm this.

“Long time no see, Kida Masaomi-kun.”

Facing the man who had called out his whole name, an expression Mikado had never seen before crossed Masaomi’s face, and he swallowed.

“Ye...yeah...hi.”

The sight of Masaomi stammering disrupted Mikado’s thoughts for a moment.

—This is the first time I’ve seen Kida-kun like this...

Fear and disgust coalesced in his eyes, but he was trying his best to suppress these feelings in his expression.

“That a Raira uniform? You got in huh. First day of school? Congrats.”

The man’s congratulation was relatively indifferent, but it wasn’t devoid of emotion either. It was like he was using the least emotion possible (but not totally absent) in his tone of voice. Just like that.

“Oh yeah. Thanks.”

“I didn’t do anything.”

“It’s rare for you to come over to Ikebukuro...”

“Yeah, that’s because I’m meeting up with some friends. And this is?”

As he said this, he glanced at Mikado and in that moment, their eyes met. Normally, Mikado would have looked elsewhere, but now he couldn’t break his gaze. It felt like if he did, he wouldn’t be acknowledged by this person. Mikado didn’t know why he thought like this, and could only remain motionless under the man’s eerily sharp-eyed gaze.

“Oh, he’s just an ordinary friend.”

Normally Masaomi would have told the other person Mikado’s name, but now it was very obvious that he had absolutely no intention of doing so. And the man turned to Mikado and said carelessly, “I’m Orihara Izaya, nice to meet you.”

On hearing this name, Mikado suddenly understood everything. One of the people he shouldn’t get involved, someone he shouldn’t make an enemy of. But, the man in front of him didn’t seem all that dangerous, at least not like he’d imagined. Besides those sharp eyes of him and his handsome face, he looked like just any other youth. Maybe except for his glossy black hair. In the surrounding crowd full of people sporting dyed hair, he stood out. He seemed more like an intellectual who gave tuition in some remote district.

—He looks more normal than I thought.

Still thinking that, he told the man his name.

"Sounds like the name of an air conditioner."

Izaya said that right after hearing Mikado's name. There was no derision or surprise in his words, purely what he thought.

And just as Mikado contemplated about whether to reply or not, Izaya slowly raised his hand and waved, without waiting for Mikado to talk.

"It's about time for me to meet my friends, so see ya."

After that, Izaya hurried away. After watching him leave, Masaomi puffed out his chest and took a deep breath.

"It's about time for us to go too...oh yeah, where were we supposed to go?"

"That person just now—is he really that scary?"

"I wonder if you could say he's scary...but...I did quite a few things while I was still in junior high...so I met that person once, and then I got scared of him. Well how to put it...his scariness is on a different level from those hooligans. It's more of 'unstable'. Or rather, unpredictable. It's like every five seconds his way of thinking changes drastically. I don't think you could say his scariness is dangerous, per se, it's more like...'nauseating'. A kind of feeling that slowly oozes into your consciousness.

Anyway, I'm never going back to that 'side'. So don't come looking for me if you want to smoke pot."

Pot. After suddenly hearing that word, Mikado hurriedly shook his head. He'd never seen marijuana before, but based on the knowledge he got from the Web, even he knew what it was.

"I was kidding. You're so obedient, I think you'd probably only pick up cigs and beer only when you turn exactly twenty. Anyway, you'd better remember this, it's best not to get involved with that guy and Heiwajima Shizuo."

Masaomi didn't seem like he had any intention of saying anymore about Izaya, so he turned soundlessly towards the crowds.

This was the first time Mikado had seen Masaomi like this. He decided that Masaomi's peculiar state of mind at the moment was more important and pushed the subject of Izaya to the back of his mind.

—This place will never stop interfering with the normality of my life.

Mikado didn't really have a reason to think about all this, but the more he thought about it, the more he expected from this place and the life he was about to lead.

He'd only been here a few days, but the words 'I want to go home' had completely vanished from Mikado's dictionary.

The cold, indifferent crowds he had once thought them to be were like saints marching before him today.

—Something exciting's going to happen next. It definitely will. The adventure I've been looking for is starting, like in dramas and mangas. It's going to happen here, there's no doubt about it.—

Such twisted thoughts made Mikado's eyes shine, and kindled his hopes for his life as of tomorrow.



第五章

Chapter  
街の日常夜

# Chapter 5: Everyday in the City—Night

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"Anyway, let's talk about the kind of stuff you guys wanna do before you die."

Orihara Izaya asked this morbid question in a karaoke box. Izaya was holding a drink, his steady voice resounding through the quiet compartment.

The two women in the compartment with him merely shook their heads in response to his question.

"I see. But, do you really want to die with someone like me? Aren't there loads of other great guys who could do it with you?"

"It's because there aren't any. That's why we wanna die."

"Yeah."

Izaya nodded in a rather lighthearted fashion, and silently studied the two women. Their expressions weren't particularly depressing, and someone who didn't know the details, would never expect that they wanted to kill themselves.

The reason for them being here was in fact a response to the invitation: "Let's die together!" Izaya had posted on a suicide pact website.

The contents of Izaya's invitation had sounded oddly cheerful and positive. This couldn't really be helped, because it was really an ad for a social networking site that he'd modified a little and then pasted on the message boards. But, if you browsed through the other stuff he posted, you'd notice that most of them sounded just as upbeat.

The messages were clear and to the point, and explained in great detail, various methods of suicide and gave a tremendous amount of encouragement (to kill themselves), not at all like someone who was intending to commit suicide himself. There were even some which were written very formally, like official documents for some renowned enterprise. Izaya loved looking these impressive 'Suicide Invitations' he'd written.

The two women before him had chosen to die. One because she couldn't find a job, and the other was because she hadn't been able to recover from the blow of a failed relationship, and both were despairing as such.

At first glance, it seemed unacceptable for someone to kill themselves over such reasons, but ever since the declining economy, the number of people who were committing suicide over their failed careers were increasing steadily each year. If you classified these people according to their state of employment, you'd find that most of them were in fact unemployed. Also, if you considered them according to age, you'd see that the number of suicides by people who were below twenty was far lesser than those in other age groups. Recently, after media coverage on suicides driven by bullying in school, people were given the impression that the majority of people who committed suicide were youngsters. But in actuality, most of them were in fact the so-called 'adults'.

Like the two women before Izaya. They were both adults, around twenty five to twenty six years old.

Meeting with people who wanted to kill themselves—he'd already done it over twenty times. During these meetings, Izaya noticed that many of them didn't have much in common. The attitude people had towards death varied widely, with some people maintaining a smile at all times. There were even some who clearly wanted to die, but still recorded TV shows before they went out.

But—none of the people Izaya met had ever really committed suicide in the end. This made him feel rather 'disappointed'.

The news loved to cover suicide incidents like the ones occurring in the recent years, especially after the media's influence, where people met online on websites to join suicide pacts. The media did not cover however, the solo suicide cases, which were in fact maintained at around over thirty thousand people these few years.

What were they thinking when they decided to die? Was there really no other way? Or perhaps, who did they want to die for? When people decided to die, just what kind of deep despair did they have in their hearts?

Orihara Izaya loved humans more than anything else, and thus wanted rather badly to know the answers.

But, he hadn't met up with them because he wanted to talk them out of committing suicide. And the reason those people who met up with Izaya never committed suicide wasn't because they never had the intention to die in the first place and had come just for fun, nor was it because they'd backed out.

Izaya's true nature, was slowly revealing itself from its easygoing guise.

After listening to their reasons for suicide, Izaya finally raised his voice and asked a different question breezily.

"So, what're you going to do after you die?"

On hearing the sudden question, the two women froze, and then gazed at Izaya dumbly.

"Uh...you mean like after going to heaven?"

—She's already decided to kill herself and yet still wants to go to heaven. How bold can she get? But of course, it's things like this that make humans all the more interesting.

"Does Nakura-san believe in the afterlife?" the other woman asked Izaya. Nakura was the fake alias Izaya had randomly come up for himself. Izaya smiled and shook his head at the question and asked them instead, "Then do you two believe in the afterlife?"

"I do. But instead of an afterworld, I think people become wandering ghosts in this world..."

"I don't. Death is an expanse of nothingness, just a piece of darkness...but that's much better than this."

On hearing their answers, Izaya made a huge mental 'X'.

—Aw, how disappointing. This is really disappointing. A total waste of time. They're only junior high standard. The atheists last time were much more interesting. These two only care about themselves.

Izaya then concluded that the two women weren't serious about death. Or perhaps, they were envisioning

death in their own ways.

He narrowed his eyes and smiled mockingly.

"That's not good. How can people who want to die think about life after death?"

"Eh...?"

The two of them were completely baffled, as though they were looking at something completely illogical. Izaya continued.

"Thinking about the afterlife is a right reserved for only the living. But, if this conclusion something you thought about endlessly, and considered thoroughly, then I have nothing to say. But, being forced into the abyss of despair—like getting your life savings scammed by some Lombard...people who have been forced into their hopeless situations by external factors—only then do they have this right."

Izaya went on smiling and said lightly, "But for you, you gave yourselves these problems right? You've already decided to walk the path of hopelessness and you still place your hopes on an afterlife. I don't think that's a good thing to do."

The two women noticed something. The whole time, it had been them confessing about why they wanted to die, and the man before them had mentioned absolutely nothing about himself.

"Um...does Nakura-san... want to die?"

In response to this totally unreserved, direct question, Izaya answered impassively.

"No."

In that instant in the compartment, the only sounds that were heard were those coming from the other rooms. Not long after, one of the women seemed to have cracked and shouted.

"That's too much! How could you lie to us?"

"I think...you've gone too far!"

After the woman's tantrum, the other reprimanded Izaya sternly. But even as he saw their reactions, Izaya remained unmoved.

—Ah, it still ended like this...

Izaya had seen situations like this many times before. Everyone reacted differently. Some people got over it without batting an eyelid, and some just left without a word. But he had yet to see anyone remain totally calm. If anyone could meet with such a situation and take it easy by just going "Oh, I see.", then they probably wouldn't have needed a 'companion' to die with. But Izaya hadn't seen all of what mankind had to offer, so he felt that couldn't totally base his judgments on psychology books. He wasn't that sure yet, but he still thought like that. If anyone one could remain calm in a situation like this, and it wasn't because they had just come for fun, then it was probably because they secretly hoped that there would be someone who could talk them out of suicide, or it was to stop others from doing so; and maybe even because they were 'just like him'.

"Despicable! Stop it bastard! Who do you think you are anyway? You've gone too far!"

“Eh? Why?”

Izaya’s expression, was one that said “I have no idea what you’re talking about.” He swept his innocent gaze across the two women, and he closed his eyes—

Seconds passed and when Izaya opened his eyes again, that cheerful expression on his face had completely vanished, and replaced with an entirely different kind of smile.

“Eh...?”

On seeing his face, the woman who believed in life after death made a sound very much like a scream.

A smile was indeed lingering on Izaya’s face. Only, it was a completely different kind of smile from before. Only after the two women had seen his expression, did they truly understand the meaning of ‘there are many kinds of smiles’.

Although he really was smiling, his expression seemed to be as stiff as a mask. Even though it was a smile, it was also extremely cold. And precisely because it was a smile, that made people who saw it feel unspeakable terror—it was a smile like that.

The two women had originally countless choice words they’d like to impart upon Izaya, but now, they remained momentarily dumb and couldn’t open their mouths. It was like some kind of inhuman creature was standing before them.

But Izaya maintained that terrible smile and asked the same question.

“What? What do you mean I’ve gone too far? I don’t get it.”

“That’s because...”

“You—”

The women were interrupted by Izaya’s hardened response.

“Didn’t you want to die? So what does it matter what I tell you? Even if you were lied to or scolded...you’ll be disappearing in a while anyway. So if you’re anguished because I lied to you, then why don’t you just bite your tongue off? Did you know by biting your tongue off to commit suicide, you won’t die because of blood loss, but because of a momentary shock that causes the remaining part of your tongue to compress the trachea and thus results in suffocation. That way, all the things you find unpleasant will be gone. You wouldn’t exist anymore. It’s that simple, and you say I’ve gone too far. I think you’ve gone too far.”

“I understand that! But...”

“You don’t understand at all.”

This time, Izaya was talking to the woman who had said ‘death was an expanse of nothingness’, and the tone he spoke in was even more forceful.

—With that smile on his face.

“You’re the one that doesn’t understand. You don’t understand at all. You just said death was just a big

piece of nothing, right? But, that's not true at all. I guess you wanted to say, that you wouldn't have any worries any more. But death is actually just disappearing. Your troubles won't disappear, just your existence."

The women did not respond. They were transfixed by Izaya's smile.

Izaya's smile was getting more and more hideous, and it seemed to the two who were listening to him that it was hardly human.

"A situation where nothing's there can't be called 'nothing'. And it's not the opposite of 'something' either. The nothing you speak of is where there really is nothing but eternal darkness. But, this notion is based on the 'existence of the darkness', so how can it be nothing? If you want to be rid of your sorrows by dying, then you need the 'knowledge that you've escaped your troubles'. Isn't that something? So like I said, you don't even know what you're thinking, and you don't even know that you don't know a thing, so you definitely won't be able to envision something like that. Your ways of thinking aren't different from most people. Opinions at this level are something even elementary school students who don't believe in life after death can understand, fear and worry about right?"

In reality, these two women both knew Izaya's theory was full of loopholes, and there was plenty of room for a rebuttal. But they thought, even if they retorted, could they communicate with the person before them with just mere words?—

Such thoughts didn't arise from doubt, but fear.

"But...this...isn't this just what you think?"

The woman mustered all her courage to force out those words, which faltered easily as she saw Izaya's smile.

"True. I have no idea about that. The fact that I don't believe in the afterlife, is something I just decided for myself. But, it would be good if there was one—I can only assume though."

Ha Ha. Izaya let out two syllables of a frigid, dry laugh, and went on in a breezy voice.

"But it's different for you. You're doubtful about the afterlife, but you still want to die. Don't tell me your religion teaches you to commit suicide, and even encourages to 'kill yourself because you can't find a job or because you're having relationship problems'? If it was like that, then I have nothing to say. I would even think that you're amazing—but if not, then just shut up."

Finally, as if he wanted them to agree, he cocked his head slightly and slowly revealed his conclusion:

"If you're just a casual believer of the afterlife, don't go around discussing it OK? It's an insult to the afterlife. It's an even bigger insult to people who don't want to die, but are forced into it by their circumstances."

Then, seconds went by. Although it had only been a little while, but it seemed like an incredibly long time to the two women.

In this short time that seemed like eternity, Izaya once again closed his eyes. But when he opened them again, his smile had once again become gentle and relaxing.

The air around them seemed to flow again, but the two women didn't dare to move an inch. And Izaya

began to tell them things that were completely different from just now.

"Ah, hahaha, just now when I asked you 'what was going to happen after you died'...I was really talking about money!"

"...Huh?"

"I hate wastage. So, could I trouble you to borrow as much money as you can, give it to me, and then die? Because those insurance reviews are really troublesome, and probably won't get through, so it's easier if you just loan money. So when you die, at least the money you borrowed won't go to waste. If I sell your registrar and your bodies, I'll be able to rake in a good price. Besides, I have some connections which specialise in this sort of thing."

Completely different from the malicious grin from before, Izaya's current smile was very human indeed, and the words from his mouth were loyal to human desire.

The women made to say something, but Izaya was louder.

"Let me test you. Question one. Why am I sitting nearest to the door?"

The two women noticed that Izaya was seated in such a way that seemed like he was deliberately blocking the door. And they experienced a totally different kind of fear from just now. If Izaya's smile just now was the devil's smile, then the Izaya now seemed to be the agglomeration of all mankind's evil intent.

"Question two. What are these wheeled suitcases under the table going to be used for?"

Only when Izaya mentioned it, did the two women realise that there were two large suitcases under the table, placed opposite to their seats. The kind used to carry luggage on a vacation.

"First hint. The suitcases are empty."

On hearing this, trepidation rose inside the two women at the same time. Although this was the first time they had met, both of them felt exactly the same way about Izaya.

"Second hint. These two suitcases were chosen because 'they match your size'."

A nauseating sensation permeated them, and it came from their strong revulsion of the man in front of them. Yet, there was something else that made the world before them start to spin.

"?! What's...this..."

When they realised their unfavourable situation, it was already too late, and they hardly had the strength to stand up.

"Question three. If you two come at me at the same time, you might be able to beat me, so why don't you? Hint. I handed you your drinks when they came earlier."

The world wouldn't stop spinning. In their blurry consciousness, they heard Izaya's voice float past their years. His tender voice was like a lullaby, and sucked the two of them into the darkness.

"It's love! You don't have any love for death. You have to embrace death with love. And you have too little respect for nothingness. If it's like this, how could I willingly die with you?"

Then, with her last iota of strength, one of the women glared venomously at Izaya.

"I'll never...forgive you! I'll...kill you...!"

On hearing this, Izaya grinned, and gently caressed the woman's cheek.

"Excellent. If you have the strength to hate, then you can live. I'm awesome. I saved your life. You have to thank me properly OK?"

After confirming that the woman had lost consciousness, Izaya used a hand to stroke her temple and thought for a while.

"Ah~but I don't like being hated by humans. I think I'll just kill you."



It was a midnight, and the day was almost over. In a corner of South Ikebukuro Park, there was a pair of erect human silhouettes. One of them was Orihara Izaya, and the other was a completely black shadow.

So, I just have to put them on a park bench and I'm done?

Holding an advanced electronics user manual, Celty typed out a string of words and held it up to Izaya. Izaya grinned and answered with a brief, happy "Yes."

Standing in front of the inky shadow, Izaya laughed merrily as he counted his money.

"Actually I wanted to drag them off to some loan company, but honestly, I'm bored of this."

The cheek of you to say it.

The job assigned to Celty this time was to move two people. After putting on her helmet and entering the karaoke lounge, the personnel had silently taken her to the compartment Izaya was in. And when she walked into the compartment, she happened to see Izaya trying to stuff the unconscious women into suitcases. When she was about to question this, Izaya merely smiled and asked her to help him.

In the end, Celty just helped him to move them to the park, but still wasn't clear about what was going on.

"I'm tired of this. And this is just a hobby, not work. Ah, thanks for today~ the people who usually help me with this were all busy so yeah. Usually I'll want to send them home, but I think your motorbike's already at its limit from travelling all the way to the park."

People who would assist a cause like this, probably couldn't be called decent. Although by doing this, Celty could be considered one of them, but she was more or less used to it.

A quickie job like this wasn't particularly unpleasant, but she didn't like it very much either.

This won't somehow involve the police right? Don't implicate me.

"Don't worry. I haven't asked you to move corpses. I only asked you to move two drunk women to a park bench."

You don't need a suitcase for that.

Izaya honestly couldn't detect the sarcasm in that, and merely gazed meaningfully at the helmeted courier. Then, Izaya suddenly asked, "Say courier, do you believe in the afterlife?"

Why the sudden question?

"You don't need to know, just take it as part of your job and answer me."

You'll know if you die.

Very calmly, Celty typed out this response on her PDA. Then she typed out a question and showed it to Izaya.

What about you?

"Actually, I don't really believe in the afterlife. Honestly, I'm really scared of dying and I'd like to live a little longer."

You're someone who enjoys drugging women and makes a living out of dealing information, but still wants to have a long life?

On seeing this spontaneous query, Izaya laughed sheepishly. From his current expression, it was hard to imagine he was someone who had sunk completely into the underworld.

"Because if I die, I'll disappear. So if I don't make use of my life to do all the things I enjoy, won't I have regrets?"

Celty added another line: "Disgusting bastard" and deleted it before Izaya could see it.

Orihara Izaya was an ordinary human.

Even for a criminal like him, he wasn't especially violent, nor was he particularly callous and was not even to close to being someone who killed without batting an eyelid.

All the mortal desires normal people had, he had them too. Unsavoury things people did on impulse, he'd done it all. It was just like that. He was no extraordinary criminal mastermind, but was merely overly engrossed in his interests. But as his 'interests' got stronger and stronger, he managed to learn many things in his pursuits, and eventually became someone who earned petty change from selling this information to underworld organisations and the police.

But Izaya's name was already considerably well-known in many places, and he himself was familiar with this fact. Normally his name wouldn't be pronounced 'Izaya'—

His name was derived from the combination of the biblical prophet Isaiah's name and Japanese for 'one who looks over the crowd'. But Izaya's way of life vastly differed from the biblical account, but perhaps it was because of this contradiction that allowed Izaya to be more skilled at handling various situations than ordinary people. And it was because of this that resulted in the way he lived. He valued life just as any normal person would, and he knew his own limits and played it safe where necessary. It was probably this

attitude of his that allowed him to continue immersing himself in his interests and even managed to avoid incurring the wrath of the underworld and thus avoided ‘disappearing’.

After leaving the job to Celty, Izaya deeply inhaled the stale, Ikebukuro air which seemed to be nearly a few weeks old, and decided to leave.

What did the two women he met up with look like? How were they dressed? Were they pretty or ugly? Had their make-up been fashionable or was it a mess? How did their voices sound like? Why did they want to die? And even, the question of if they even had the intention of dying—all this had already been pushed to the back of his mind.

Orihara Izaya was an outright atheist. He didn’t believe in spirits, nor did he believe in the afterlife. This was why he wanted so desperately to understand humans, and this was also the reason as to why he developed an interest in them so easily, as well as the reason he could trample on them like he did.

As for people who did not need to be understood, Izaya had absolutely no interest in them.

He’d only walked about ten metres, but he’d already completely forgotten the names of the two people who had wanted to commit suicide.

He was an informant, and unnecessary information would only get in his way.

As of now, he was most interested in two things.

The first thing, was the true identity of the courier who always wore a helmet and never spoke a word. It was the existence of the entity which rode a motorbike that didn’t make a noise and wielded a black scythe, like a Grim Reaper.

And the other thing—would be the group roaming around in Ikebukuro called the ‘Dollars’.

“I’m so excited! I’m so excited! I’m so excited! Even though I’m an informant, there are so many things I don’t know about in this city and things keep on keep on keep on emerging, appearing and disappearing. This is precisely why I can’t leave a city where humans gather! HUMAN LOVE! I love humans! I love you all! And that’s why you should all come to love me.”

As Izaya proclaimed this, he reached into his chest pocket and fished out his PDA.

He switched it on and accessed his inbox. His gaze fell on a particular person’s information.

The data showed that the subject’s name consisted of some rather impressive characters.

—It read ‘Ryuugamine Mikado’, and it was the name of the youth he’d just met today—



# 第六章 矢霧製菓 上層部

# Chapter 6: Yagiri Pharmaceuticals—Executives

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Somewhere between Ikebukuro and Shinjuku, some ways from the Mejiro district, a research facility stood quietly. Although it was a distance away from the station, but in context of Tokyo, the amount of land this three storey research facility surrounded by trees and barriers occupied was no laughing matter.

Yagiri Pharmaceuticals was one of the leading pharmaceutical companies in the Kanto region, and this was the site of its new research facility. But, its reputation as Kanto's leading pharmaceutical company was a thing of the past. Its prestige nowadays could hardly compare to that of its heyday, as its performance was sliding.

And it was just when Yagiri pharmaceutical's share prices began to fall when an American company proposed to buy over their business. The company was called 'Nebula', and had been doing joint ventures for about a century now. The company dealt in transportation, publishing, biotechnological research and so on, on a very large scale. But behind their rock-solid repertoire, there were many rumours. Like those about deals with the government. But these rumours were always quashed by their methods of legal repression.

Yagiri Pharmaceuticals was on the selling end, and as long as they gave in unconditionally, they wouldn't have to start mass-retrenchment. Although this was so, but there were some of the staff—especially the director, who was a member of the Yagiri family, who couldn't really accept this.

The one who objected to it the most violently, was a woman named Yagiri Namie. She was twenty five years old when she became the sixth research facility's, or simply the sixth research director, and was also the chairman's niece.

Namie was able to progress so quickly through the ranks, wasn't totally due to her being especially favoured since she was a Yagiri. The fact that she was exceptionally talented and efficient was also an important factor. But, the situation she was facing now had a lot to do with her family. The problem wasn't her position, but the department she worked in.

Because there was a rumour within the Yagiri family, that whatever the Namie's department was researching was in fact the main reason for Nebula's offer.

What the sixth research facility was dealing with, wasn't really medicine. The facility claimed that they were working on the development of a new kind of drug to boost the immune system, and would be ready for clinical trials in the near future—

But in fact, it was actually something that was 'not of this world'.

Twenty years ago, Namie's uncle managed to get his hands on a specimen that resembled a human head from overseas. It looked as beautiful, as if it was alive, and it was like it was sleeping. Having a beautiful girl's face as a specimen sounded rather grisly on the surface, but in fact it did not seem cruel at all, more like the head was a complete, living entity.

Namie who had been only five years old then obviously wouldn't know that the head had been smuggled.

After all, if it had been brought in by the legally appropriate means, then they'd surely have been stopped by the customs.

Her uncle had no idea what kind of magic could have conjured such a thing, and as such even began to see it as the Yagiri family heirloom and showered his care on it. The moment he had some free time, he'd lock himself in his study to admire the head, and sometimes he'd even talk to it.

Namie would often come over to play with her cousins, and when she saw her uncle do that, she'd feel a little uneasy. But after a while, she got used to it.

But, there was something that upset Namie. And that was the fact that her younger brother, Yagiri Seiji, seemed to have been bewitched by the head, and was even more hopelessly infatuated with it than her uncle.

The first time Seiji saw the head was when he was ten years old. Without her uncle's permission, she'd brought her brother and snuck in to see it. It was a regret that continued to this day.

It was because ever since then, Seiji began acting very strangely.

He'd want to go to his uncle's house for no reason, and once he got there, he'd sneak in without his uncle's knowledge to stare at the head.

And as he grew up, Seiji's obsession with the head did not wane in any way. Three years ago, when Namie had first joined the pharmaceutical company her uncle ran by her own ability, her brother confessed to her:

"Sis, there's someone I like."

The girl her brother liked, didn't have a name—nor a body.

And the feelings that rose within Namie, wasn't concern for her brother's abnormal preferences. Instead, without a doubt, it was dark, rusty red jealousy.

Namie's parents were the original successors of Yagiri Pharmaceuticals. But when her brother was born, they made a serious error with a transaction that caused them to be completely ostracised from the company core and were excluded from the inheritance rights. The couple became estranged as such, and slowly grew distant from their children.

However, her uncle still regarded them as 'a chess piece in the family', and continued caring for them. But the concern he offered was what a superior would offer to a subordinate, and was completely devoid of kinship.

Finally, Namie directed her craving for familial affection on her brother who was in a similar situation. These desires exceeded those of sisterly love, and contorted into some form of twisted affection.

And it was because of that, that Namie was absolutely unhappy with the fact that her younger brother had fallen for a 'head'. Because her brother would never reciprocate her love, and even fell in love with something that could never reciprocate his love—the thing that was just a 'head'.

Although Namie felt it was rather strange for her to be jealous of a head, but she still kept it from her uncle, and decided to secretly get rid of the head.

She had meant to retrieve the head from its glass jar and throw it away—but when she first touched the head for the first time, she realised that something was amiss.

She realised, no specimen would have such soft, tender skin, and it was even so warm. Which was to say, she realised that ‘the head was still alive’—

And then another period of time passed, and Namie managed to convince her uncle into letting the company do research on the head, and after listening to her uncle’s detailed account, learnt that the head was actually a faerie called a Dullahan—

What nonsense was that? A fairy was a small human-like creature with wings. Since when could a head be counted as fairy? But either way, the entity that was beyond death, meaning the head, was the crux here. How could she let go of an opportunity like this?

With this in mind, Namie went on to do all kinds of experiments on the head which was still alive. Perhaps she’d somehow mixed her the jealousy she felt because of her brother in with all this, but she’d always, without thinking, regard the head as an ‘experimental subject’. Namie had thought at first that while the head was in the research lab, Seiji who wasn’t authorised personnel wouldn’t be able to get near her—

But a problem immediately cropped up. The research had only just started, but Nebula had already started contacting them. The research work was carried out by only a specific few personnel. Yet the conditions the other party imposed had been ‘transfer that particular research laboratory, including all of its contents’. It was very obvious from here that they were interested in the head.

And as Namie fretted about the possibility of a spy, and raised her suspicions towards everyone else, a second problem arose, not long after the first. As she did not trust anyone, she’d always taken her key card home, but then, it had disappeared.

The incident happened on the day her card went missing. Someone had infiltrated the research facility and had taken out three security guards with a taser, and had just taken the ‘head’ and left.

How could something like this have happened? At this rate, she was finished. And just when Namie almost lost all hope, she suddenly of someone who could have done something like this. A certain someone who knew about the existence of the head, and wanted to have it, and even had the means to steal her key card.

And just as she was contemplating this, the ‘perpetrator’ called from her place of residence.

“Sis, I think I’ve killed someone. What should I do?”

It was the day before the school matriculation ceremony when her brother called her for help. It sounded like the stupid girl who had been stalking her brother had broken into the house and had seen the ‘head’, and her brother had smashed her head into a wall.

And the feeling that rose in Namie’s heart at that time, wasn’t fear that her brother might have actually killed someone, nor was it anger at the fact that her brother had stolen the head—but an unbounded joy.

No matter what it is, my brother’s depending on me now. My brother needs me. When Namie realised that this was the moment that gave her the most happiness she had ever felt, she made a decision.

She didn’t care how, but she was going to protect her brother with her own hands—



【Does Setton-san know about the Dollars?】

[Yeah I do, but I've only heard of it. Which reminds me, didn't Kanra ask this question before?]

【Ah, oh yeah. But I forgot. Sorry about that.】

[That's OK.]

【I heard some stuff about them from a friend. They seem really cool.】

[Wow~ but I've never seen them before. Do they really exist?]

【Do you think they're just a web rumour?】

[Not really, but I don't really know either. Besides, even if they really exist, normal law-abiding people like us will probably never run into them.]

【You're right...】

[It's better if with don't get involved with people like that.]

—Kanra-san has entered the chatroom—

《Hi everyone~ Kanra-chan's here!》

【Good evening~】

[Evening~]

《My, my, are you guys talking about the Dollars?》

《They really exist, because they even have their own exclusive website ne~!》

《But if you want to browse it, you need an ID and a password.》

【I see...】

[I won't look at it anyway, so it doesn't matter.]

【...Kanra-san sure knows a lot of stuff.】

《That's the only thing I'm good for after all w.》

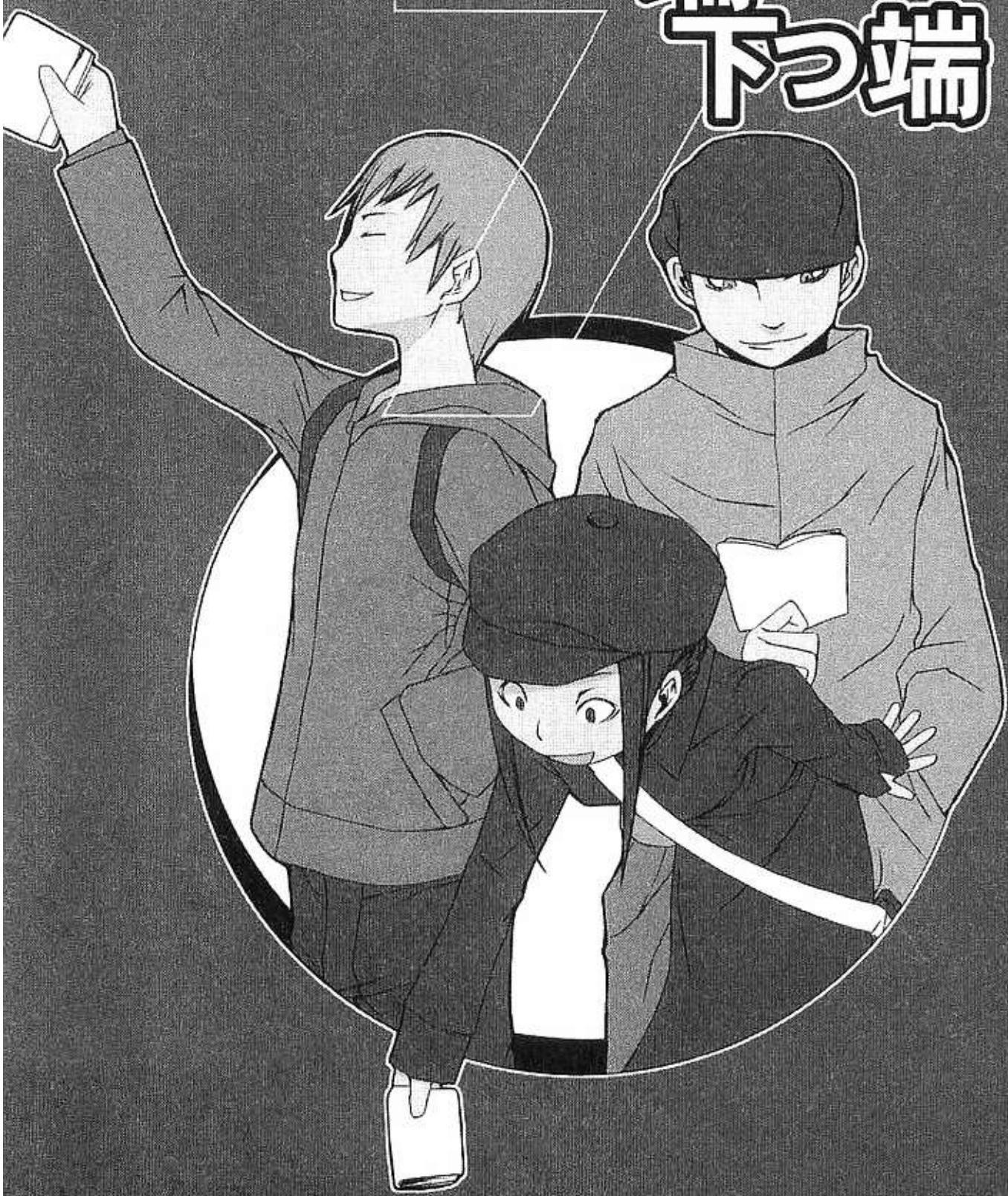
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# Chapter 7: Yagiri Pharmaceuticals— Subordinate's Subordinate's Subordinate

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It was just past noon in Ikebukuro. A van was parked on a road a little way from the city. The rear windows of the van were one-way, and it wasn't possible to see if anyone was inside.

In this mysterious new space which had just suddenly appeared, sounds of something getting hit resounded, together with the cries of a young man.

"I told you I don't know! Please stop...I beg of you!"

A swollen-faced hoodlum pleaded, in as respectful a tone as he could.

He was the hoodlum who had, roughly twenty four hours ago, sent Celty flying by ramming a car into her, and was also the one who had faced the wrath of Celty's scythe. And when he woke up, he'd found himself lying in the back of an unfamiliar van. He'd been trussed up and he could hardly move. The back of the van didn't have any seats, and the floor was covered in grey carpet. And the man in front of him, had been questioning him repeatedly ever since he'd come around.

"Hurry up. Just~ who's~ your superior? Hm~?"

If he didn't answer in three seconds, he'd get his face pounded in, and even if he said he didn't know, he'd still get his face pounded in.

And after the pummeling, everything would repeat in the next moment. This had gone on for three hours.

As he was being beaten up, the hoodlum calmly contemplated the situation that was before him.

—Although I didn't know who this guy was, at least the 'shadow' isn't here. But then again, now I won't be able to know if that 'shadow's' with these people or not.

In the van, there was only the man before him, and some guy wearing a hat in the driver's seat was chewing breathmints. Mid-volume classical music was playing in the car, so that even if he screamed, it wouldn't be able to arouse the suspicion of passers-by.

—I'm finished if that 'shadow's' here. I might have just blabbed about everything. From the looks of it, this guy's just a normal person. At least I can't sense that weird thing from yesterday. And being around these guys is still much better than getting taken care of by the 'higher ups'. And I'm lucky 'cos the cops didn't haul me in. Although I don't know who the hell this guy is, I'm fine as long as I don't tell him who I'm working for. It'll be fine. I just need to keep taking his blows, and he'll think I really don't know anything. Besides, they probably won't be rash enough to kill me here—

As the hoodlum contemplated this, the man before him sighed.

"You'd better spit it out now. I mean, I'm just like you. Just following orders from the 'higher ups'. I don't need to explain, 'cos you understand right? The higher ups wanna know stuff, so they got me to ask you. The 'higher ups' said, you didn't contact them, and just stirred up trouble by yourself."

—It looks like this guy's got some underground contacts huh. Hell, if he wants to work on someone else's territory, he should at least say hi to the bigshots first!

"But, since you've been beat up pretty badly, and you still don't wanna say anything, it probably means you're not some mobster. If you are, you should have contacted your peeps them and started some negotiations—we'd then have left this to our superiors to take care of. But since you didn't do that, it means you're not backed by people like us huh?"

The man grabbed the hoodlum by the chin, like he was disciplining some brat who'd been misbehaving. If this hoodlum had some kind of underworld backing or protection, then he'd have to deal with him carefully. But, since he wouldn't say if he was, this probably meant that if he wasn't afraid that the higher ups might hold him responsible—then it would be because he didn't have the protection of some underworld organizations or triad.

"Oi, this is for your own good! Spit it out! Listen good, I won't hurt you. You'd better hurry up—"

The man hadn't finished what he was saying when the door was abruptly slid open.

"Hyaya, it's really hot today!"

"I've kept~ you~ waiting~! So how's the situation, Shimada? Has he said anything?"

The boy and a girl hadn't even greeted properly, but had already scrambled into the rear of the van. The girl was garbed in designer wear from head to toe, and the boy was similarly dressed, only strangely, he was carrying a camping pack.

After seeing who it was, the man called Shimada pulled a long face and sighed.

"Time's up, the consolation prize is here. Although I feel pretty sorry for him, this one's all yours Yumasaki."

Shimada eyed the hoodlum sympathetically, and left the van.

The boy and girl left on the van shut the door behind Shimada, and faced the hoodlum, apparently rather happy.

"Hey~ hey~ Why did you do something so stupid? Of all people to kidnap, you had to kidnap Kaptano."

The girl shook her head and patted the hoodlum's shoulder.

—Kaptano? Who's that? I think I've heard this name before...

After thinking for a little while, the hoodlum finally remembered. The middle-aged illegal immigrant that he'd kidnapped was called Kaptano.

—I see. So these people are that guy's friends huh...hey wait, but aren't they Japanese? How? How are they related to him? Don't tell me they met over tea or something?

As the hoodlum's mind was in a state of confusion, the sharp-eyed boy put down his backpack in front of him and pulled the zipper open.

"Hyaya, since you haven't spoken, I'm sorry, but I'll have to torture you a little." As the boy said this, he pulled out a few Bunko books:

"Hyaya, it's Dengeki Bunko's eleventh anniversary, so Dengeki to you! So basically, just pick a book and we'll mentally torture you according to the contents of the book you pick. Usually we always let people pick from some Superman comics, but since we bought a stack of Dengeki Bunko books today...hahaha."

"Eh?"

Perhaps it might have been the boy's intention, but the hoodlum had no idea what he was talking about and was dumbfounded.

Books were placed before him, and they were light novels with beautiful illustrations on the covers. This hoodlum only read mangas before, so when he first saw the light novels, he actually mistook them for mangas.

—What the hell is he on about? Mental torture? Don't make me laugh. He even asked me to pick a book. What the hell does he want me to do? Damn it, this isn't some elementary school field trip where you get to go on amusement park rides!

"Hyayaya, if you don't pick one, you'll die."

There was mirth in the boy's eyes, yet he was dead serious. And somehow or another, the boy had somehow acquired a silver hammer and was holding it in his hand, as if to prove his point.

When the hoodlum realised he was serious, the hoodlum frantically started looking for the book that seemed the least dangerous.—Fuck! Why did I have to run into a situation like this! I wonder what Ga-san would do? Damn it, all I have to do is pick a book...definitely not 'Bludgeoning Angel Dokuro-chan'. Although there's a girl on the cover, I can guess from the title what they're gonna do to me...this one 'Double Brid'...V?...What kind of novel is this? Wait, no, that kid has a bandage on his head. Ah am I gonna get killed?! Shit, which one should I pick...

"My personal recommendation—'Inukami'!"

The girl exclaimed this loudly, and the boy went on to agree with her.

"Oh~ not bad! You wanna use dai-jaen<sup>2</sup> or shukichi<sup>3</sup>?"

"It's more fun if we use shukichi in the day. Ah~ Dokuro-chan's not bad either."

"No no no, it's too troublesome to prepare Excalibolg<sup>4</sup>..."

—??? What? Is that the name of some contingent?!

The hoodlum was absolutely nonplussed, and felt that the two of them had been using nothing but some kind of strange, unintelligible language since the start. But he wasn't the only one. The guy up front who had eyes as keen as an assassin, too, was chewing breathmints with a pained expression across his face. But—

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<sup>2</sup> Dai-jaen: literally 'great evil flame', and is one of the main abilities of the main female protagonist Yoko of the Dengeki Bunko light novel series Inukami!

<sup>3</sup> Shukichi: literally 'transportation', and is another one of Yoko's abilities in Inukami!

<sup>4</sup> Excalibolg: Mitsukai Dokuro's main weapon, a gigantic spiked club she uses to severely maim and kill people with in the Dengeki Bunko light novel series Bludgeoning Angel Dokuro-chan

"Oi, Yumasaki and Karisawa. You'd better listen up. I'm not smart and I don't read books. So I don't understand a word you guys are saying. But, I wanna remind you about something..."

The man in the driver's seat suddenly raised his voice and spoke, as if he had suddenly thought of something, and broke the silence:

"Do whatever you want, I don't care, just don't use gasoline in the car like last time."

"Eh~ Togusa's such a party pooper!"

After what Togusa said, the boy in the back seat reluctantly took back a few books.

—Ga-gasoline?!

When the hoodlum realized he'd been thinking too small, he also saw that it was now even harder to pick a book. Looking at the few remaining books, he was totally unable to determine which book would allow him to be subjected the least painful method of mental torture. After thinking it over thoroughly, he concluded that regardless of the book's contents, the two people before him would surely find some insane way to twist it.

"Can...can I ask a question?"

"Huh? What is it? We won't tell you what's gonna happen in the mental torture! That's classified information."

"If...if there was a book about Cinderella here, and I picked it, what would you do?"

After listening to the question, the boy thought for a while, slammed his clenched fist on his other palm and answered.

"That? I'd most likely find a chisel, and chisel your feet until it fits into a glass slipper."

—Ah I'm doomed no matter what I choose! Fuck!

Frustrated, the hoodlum closed his eyes and randomly grabbed a book. When he opened his eyes, he saw that the book had an English title, and there was a Japanese subtitle added at the side. The illustration on the cover was rather detailed.

"OK, it's been decided~!"

"Hyayaya, you sure have guts, to have chosen this one!"

Then, the two of them began to show an unorthodox dexterity. The girl retrieved a hand mirror from her purse, and handed it to the boy who broke it with his hammer. Then he placed a shard of the broken mirror in his palm.

"Hyayaya, I wonder how many pieces we have to stick in before we can see stuff we usually can't see... experiment START."

Then, the girl grabbed the stunned hoodlum's head and forced open his left eyelid. At this point, the hoodlum could roughly guess what was going to happen to him.

“Hold it! Wait, wait wait! This...isn’t funny! Oi! Hold on! Stop aaaaaaaaaahhh!”

“Don’t try this at home kids~ But...no one would do this anyway.”

Yumasaki’s expression steadily became more serious, and Karisawa breezily asked him, “Then, what about those people who say they committed murder because they were influenced by manga and anime?”

“No no no, you have to say this clearly and properly, so Mr Hoodlum here won’t misunderstand. There’s nothing wrong with manga and light novels~ It’s because manga and light novels can’t speak up for themselves, so all the blame is shifted to the silent party. It’s like when there’s a theft in a temple, you can just blame the statues of the deities.”

As the two engaged in this pointless conversation, the hoodlum was still absorbed in crying ‘Please stop!', ‘spare me please!' and things like that. But the boy was completely ignoring his pleas and slowly and surely brought the shard he’d taken from the broken mirror closer to the hoodlum’s eyeball.

“Everything we do has nothing much to do with manga or light novels or movies or anime or parents or school. To put it bluntly, it’s because we’re not normal. If there weren’t any mangas or light novels, we could also use some period drama, or maybe even Natsume Soseki<sup>5</sup>’s books or those prestigious educational materials authorities are promoting~ Then, I wonder what kind of reaction the government’ll have!”

“Stop it uuughaaahhhhhhhhhh!!”

“And besides, someone who could blame manga’s influence for what they did, can never be called a manga fan.”

And just when the glass shard was right about to penetrate the eyeball, the hoodlum’s hopes suddenly soared.

“Oi. Cut it out.”

The van’s back lifting door was suddenly opened, and the low baritone of a male sounded.

“Dotachin!”

“Ka-Kadota.”

Their expressions humbled and they straightened themselves up. From the looks of it, the newcomer was superior to those two in terms of position. The man called Kadota glared at the hoodlum, and then turned to the boy and girl.

He said, “Is that what you call mental torture? And when the blood spurts out, it’ll dirty the books, idiots.”

“So...sorry.”

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<sup>5</sup> Natsume Soseki: a renowned Japanese novelist in the Meiji era (1868-1912). You can read more about him on Wikipedia.



After talking, Kadota grabbed the hoodlum's collar and pulled him up. The hoodlum started hyperventilating again and tears, mucous and saliva from his eyes, nose and mouth had mixed together and were dripping incessantly from his face. When the hoodlum finally managed to calm down, Kadota added:

"Your pals...fessed up."

"Huh...eh...ah?!"

At first, the hoodlum could hardly comprehend what he had heard; and as he was trying to make out its meaning, his expression momentarily changed.

—A traitor?! Who?! Ga-san? No, it can't be. Then who else is there? Shit, this is bad. I'm a goner. What the hell's happening now?!

"Only half of them talked, but we'll be able to get more results in a bit. So, you're not needed any more."

—Not needed anymore, so I'll be freed? Please do that! Since I'll be blacklisted by the 'company personnel' to be taken care of, I might as well run away to some other place.

Kadota's earlier words were like a sliver of hope to the frantic hoodlum, but his next words sent him reeling into the depths of hell.

"So, in that case, you can rest in peace."

In that moment, the hoodlum just snapped:

"Wait! No, please wait! I'll...I'll talk! I'll tell you anything. I'll tell you whatever they didn't say! So please, please please don't kill me!"

"I see. So although you guys dress like this, but you're still considered part of the working class right?"

The hoodlum admitted that they were employed in a tiny manpower dispatch company. When the company got some job requests, they'd send them to do them, and could be labeled as handymen. But, to put it accurately, this was all on the surface and if further investigations were carried out, it would be found that this manpower dispatch company had signed a contract with a certain other company.

And this company—was a family-run business and had a research facility near Ikebukuro and was a pharmaceutical company which was starting to go bust.

After listening to the hoodlum's willing recount, Kadota smiled.

"So a failing business is kidnapping people so they can conduct experiments on them? What kind of foreign story is that?

Although he said this, but in fact, Kadota didn't really doubt the hoodlum's words at all. After all, someone who was on the brink of death probably wouldn't lie. And there were quite a few weird rumours surrounding Yagiri Pharmaceuticals of late.

After instructing the others to find a suitable place to leave the hoodlum at, Kadota made to leave the van.

Then he heard the feeble voice of the hoodlum.

“You you...you guys, just what...are you people...”

Kadota stopped in his tracks and didn’t even turn his head to answer him.

“...Dollars. Ring a bell?”

After Kadota had gotten down from the van, Shimada who was already out asked him something.

“Hey, Kadota, do you think the stuff the others said...was a lie?”

“They got busted huh?”

Shimada first made a face at Kadota, and then smiled as if he finally understood everything.

“OK then, this is much better than letting Yumasaki handle everything. I like Dengeki Bunko a lot, so when I see them muck around like that with their books, it’s pretty heartbreaking.”

“Ah...which reminds me, this is the first time we’ve done something like this since joining the Dollars right? Although we did it for Kaptano. But without the Dollars, we’d never have gotten to know Kaptano...”

Kadota and Shimada, and Yumasaki and Karisawa had always been pretty tight.

At the start, it was just a get-together of a group of good friends, but somehow or another, dangerous people like Yumasaki and the others started joining too. Although they never knew what exactly had gone wrong in the middle of it all, but since they were already here, then they would have to keep thinking up methods to keep them in line—

This was what Kadota had originally thought, but in the end, it became natural that he should even help them find a job and settle down. In this group, besides him, all of them were working.

Kadota himself in fact knew a few people from the underworld, but he wasn’t bound by any organization, and thus he never did anything particularly earth-shattering. But then one day, someone who wanted to recruit this group, sent an email to the leader, Kadota. The contents of the email were very simple, merely asking them if they wanted to join the Dollars.

There were no restrictions or rules, and they just needed to say that they were part of the Dollars—the conditions were just that strange. There was no foreseeable benefit to both parties, but the Dollars were a rather famous group around Ikebukuro, and if they could call themselves a part of it, it would be a very interesting thing indeed. Kadota himself wasn’t really interested, but after being swept up by the enthusiasm of the others, he finally accepted the invitation to join.

—The problem is that I’m too soft. Dammit, even Heiwajima Shizuo got a proper job.

Kadota had originally thought it was just someone who knew his email playing a prank on him—he totally didn’t expect that just one day after accepting the invitation, he’d see his handle up there on the Dollars website.

“So what did the Dollars head have say about this?”

“Dunno.”

"Eh?"

"Well, to be honest, I've never met the leader of this group. There are multiple smaller organisations within the main one, but the person at the absolute top has never revealed himself before."

Just who would create an organisation like this? Kadota was rather curious about this. Although it was rather unsettling to be led by someone he didn't know how to address nor knew what they looked like; but if there was no one at the top, then there wouldn't be a feeling of 'being placed under anyone'.

If you wanted to know who'd do this kind of thing, then there could only be—Orihara Izaya.

—While I was in Ikebukuro, we bumped into each other a few times. He was a rude bastard and gave me a stupid nickname like Dotachin. Now even Karisawa's calling me that.

As Kadota's thoughts suddenly strayed to that name, he realized that since thinking about the seemingly non-existent 'higher up' wasn't going to do any good, he should stop thinking about it.

So the strongest people over here still had to be the gangs and triads, as well as the police. Even the rumoured Dollars couldn't match up to them.

No matter how what kinds of stuff we do, the sheer number and power of this group people will still be meaningless. We're just a fleeting apparition in this ever-changing city.

And it's exactly because of this, that we want even more to prove the existence of this 'apparition'.

Even Kadota understood something like this...

Whether this illusion was the Dollars or not, was something no one could be sure of prior to its disappearance—



第八章 ダブルビート 東原編  
Chapter

# Chapter 8: Double Heroine—The Sonohara Volume

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Mikado and the others had gone through a few days of high school life, and had just finished undergoing a health examination. Lessons would finally start the next day. Raira Academy had the tradition of organizing a school tour and club exhibitions the day after the matriculation ceremony and the third day was reserved for a school health examination and a class council meeting.

It was already the third day, during the class council meeting and it was time to appoint the class representatives, but—

“That’s right, let’s go pick up girls!”

Masaomi used both hands to slam a textbook shut, like in some ad he’d seen.

This was 1A, Mikado’s class, yet Masaomi from class 1B was sitting inside. In a classroom where most of the people were wearing school uniforms, Masaomi, who had already started wearing casual clothes, stood out even more.

“Why are you here...”

Mikado had already known Masaomi was there a while ago, but had waited until now to say something. The teacher wasn’t in the classroom, so student number 1 had taken over in heading the meeting.

“Uh, the maintenance committee representatives are Yamazaki-san and Nishizaki-san. The welfare committee representatives are Yagiri-san and Asakura-san. The discipline committee representatives are Kuzuhara-san and Kanemura-san, and the electoral committee representatives are...”

This school had a system of electing one male and female student to be representatives of each committee in the class. After the student heading the meeting had finished reading off the results on the blackboard, he thought for a while as to what he should do next.

“It’s time to elect the class representatives, so does anyone want to run?”

“Me...”

Mikado grabbed Masaomi’s hand with lightning-quick speed to prevent him from raising it, but then began to regret doing so.

—Class representative huh? Sounds fun, but it might be a pain too.

Mikado was looking for a respite from his mundane everyday life. He’d left the land that was all he had always known to come to this new world he’d never seen before. And spending some of the happiest days of his life in this new environment had only strengthened his resolve.

After feeling that inexplicable excitement from what he’d experienced, Mikado could now clearly comprehend what danger was, but still couldn’t stop himself from crying out:

—I want more excitement! I want an unconventional life! I want more change!

If Mikado were to meet some extortionist or some scam artist or even a weird religious cult now, he might even get conned by them.

And if it was on Masaomi's invitation, he might even be willing to go to a Bosokozu gathering.

There was a part of Mikado's conscious which was in a rather dangerous state, but there was another part of it which badly wanted to run for a special position like the class representative. But then again, he was worried that his duties as a class representative might hinder him from his pursuit of excitement.

In times like this, he should first consider the situation first, but as he thought this—

“...”

A girl lowered her head slightly, and raised her hand.

It was the fair skinned, bespectacled girl—Sonohara Anri. It was the pretty, refreshingly refined girl with the vibe that repelled others.

“Oh, you’re...Sonohara...Anri-san? Then everyone, please give a round of applause to acknowledge her appointment.”

The classroom rang with relatively unenthusiastic applause. Since there was no one interested in nominating themselves for class representative, so naturally, there would be no one interested in whoever became class representative.

“Then, I’ll leave the rest to you.”

The student temporarily heading the meeting wrote Anri’s name on the board and returned to his seat, looking rather relieved.

“Um, do any boys want to run for the position of class representative?”

Anri’s voice was delicate, yet extremely clear. But since no one was willing to volunteer, a kind of thick silence started to permeate the classroom.

—What should I do?

Unable to decide, he stared intently at Anri up front.

Suddenly, Anri’s gaze stopped at a male student.

Mikado turned to see who she was looking at—and realized it was a rather tall male student. He was the second tallest in the class, and was probably the newly elected welfare representative.

Yagiri Seiji. This name was clearly written under the four words ‘Head of Welfare Committee’. Aside from being taller than most people, he seemed like an ordinary teenager. But, there was absolutely no trace of childishness on his face. So even if he were to say that he was already an adult, he would probably be able to get away with it.

But since he was already a part of the other committees, why was Anri still staring at him? Did she have

some sort of crush on him? As Mikado thought about these things which were none of his business—

Her gaze swept to Mikado's direction

—Eh?

Under her glasses, a very uneasy expression crossed her face, which made feel Mikado feel rather troubled.

“I’m such a sinful man...”

The moment Anri’s gaze left them, Masaomi who was sitting against the wall had started babbling nonsense once again.

“That girl’s fallen for me. Did you see that uneasy expression on her face when she thought of all the ‘dangerous’ and ‘risky days’ she’ll have with me in the days to come?”

In response to the whisper Masaomi had meant for him, Mikado replied nonchalantly, “Sorry, could you speak Japanese? In case you didn’t know, this is Japan.”

“Eh...! Even when you’re being mean, you’re totally calm! I never thought that the first obstacle in my path would be you...but then again, I live for love, so even if I have to kill my best friend to achieve my goals, I won’t think twice!”

“Um, in any case, you should.”

But after thinking about it, Anri could very well be looking at Masaomi, who had nothing to do with anything, and not himself. Then that would explain her unease. But as Mikado thought about this, he secretly griped within himself: “Why did that idiot have to sit here?”—

It was then Mikado realized, what Anri was really looking at.

The seat Masaomi was using, was really the seat of the female student who didn’t come for the matriculation ceremony and was absent for three days in a row. At the same time, Mikado also recalled Anri being rather preoccupied with the absent student from the very beginning.

As he thought and thought, Mikado quietly raised his hand. Although he had absolutely no idea about what Anri was thinking, but since no one else was willing to do it, then he would. It was because he was thinking that, so he decided to raise his hand.

“Um...you’re...”

“Ryuugamine Mikado! Ryuugamine! Mikado!”

As if she had been startled by Masaomi’s rather gratuitous outburst, Anri hurriedly wrote down Mikado’s name on the blackboard. And only then did some of the other students notice Masaomi’s presence, but no one paid any special attention to him. No one really wanted to stir up any trouble and since no one there even knew Masaomi’s name, they wanted as little to do with someone who had already switched to casual clothes and even had dyed hair and ear piercings.

The plain, rather obedient looking Mikado on the other hand seemed to fit the image of a class representative very well, so no one objected. And thus, the meeting went on smoothly without a hitch. “And on this note, we’ve elected all the committee heads. Committee heads, please don’t forget to attend

tomorrow's student council meeting. The meeting time and place has been written the blackboard in front of the general office.

After reading out from the notice on the teacher's table, the newly elected female class representative quietly concluded the meeting.

"We have to clean up before we leave, so could everyone please help?"

Although Mikado was now one of the class representative, he hadn't had a chance to speak, so he could only tidy up forlornly.

As Mikado dragged a mop across the corridor, Masaomi leaned against the window and chewed the tip of his tongue, "Haha~ so it's like that huh..."

"What?"

"I underestimated you. In elementary school, you started crying when people spread rumours about you and your childhood friend. But now you've become someone who'll take the initiative to schedule a 'rendezvous' full of 'love', like a 'hunter' who's grabbing the 'chance'."

"Yeah yeah, whatever you say," Mikado responded coolly to Masaomi's unintelligible taunt.

"Oh yeah, which committee is Kida-kun in?"

"Oh, I'm head of discipline."

As Mikado imagined what his friend would look like enforcing discipline, Mikado bluntly expressed his opinion on the matter.

"Wow..."

"What was that 'wow' for? I actually wanted to run for the position of class representative, but unfortunately I lost in an exhilarating janken competition held by the fifteen male candidates."

"Fifteen people?! With janken?! That's way more exciting than my class!"

On seeing Mikado's obvious astonishment, a smug grin appeared on Masaomi's face, "Only six people competed for the position of discipline committee head. Oh yeah, the discipline head in your class looks as if he's going to be very strict about discipline. So I was thinking, if I got the job, then I could do whatever I wanted with the rules."

"...What are you saying?"

"Forget it. Since I'm the head of discipline, I'm not going to let anyone bring heavy weaponry into the school!"

"Then what about light weaponry..."

After Mikado had once again regained his use of icy remarks, Masaomi could only stomp on the floor mutinously.

He looked out the window for a while, and finally repeated what he'd suggested earlier before.

“I know, let’s go pick up girls!”

“Can we even do that?”

As he watched his friend who seemed to be growing more excitable each day, Mikado finally finished up his share of the cleaning work.

Just as Mikado had finished putting away the mop in the cleaning closet and hoisted up his bag with one hand to go off with Masaomi—

They saw Sonohara Anri and a tall guy at the main exit—Yagiri Seiji talking. Anri’s face was absolutely serious as she asked him questions. On the other hand, Seiji was answering them with absolute disgust across his face.

“Because—...—after that—really?”

“I told you I don’t know. All I know is that she stopped coming to bother me one day.”

They couldn’t really hear Anri’s voice, and could only hear Seiji’s impatient response. Then he brushed her off just like that and strode in the direction of the two of them. It was probably because he’d finished cleaning up the main exit and was going back to the classroom to get his bag.

Anri kept staring at his retreating back, and when she realised Mikado and Masaomi were watching too, and hurriedly ran out.

“Whoa whoa, it’s only the third day of school and you’re already having a lover’s spat. Not bad huh.”

Mikado turned and noticed that Masaomi was standing in front of Seiji and provoking him. And he was too late to stop him.

From the appearance of things now, Masaomi was obviously the bad guy.

“...Who are you? It’s not like that.”

“Uh, that, you’re Yagiri-kun right? I’m in your class. My name’s Ryuugamine Mikado, nice meeting you.”

“Oh...that’s right, your name’s easy to remember.”

On seeing the class representative standing there, Seiji managed to relax a little.

In order to ease the tension between them, Mikado had decided to step in. Masaomi pushed him away and took a step forward.

“Hey...Kida-kun!”

“You’re pretty tough huh. Let’s go pick up girls!”

(—Ah—)

Masaomi’s nonsensical outburst caused Mikado and Seiji to sigh incredulously.

“Wait, Kida-kun! What are you talking about?”

“Listen good. When you’re picking up girls, you need to have a tall guy with you. If it’s only the two of us, your bland exterior will take away the appeal of my appearance and we’ll just break even!”

“That’s mean! Why don’t you just get your classmates to go with you?”

“You idiot. If my classmates find out about it, if you add up both the guys and the girls, there’ll be at least twenty people coming!”

—Girls hitting on girls? As Mikado wanted to tell this to Masaomi, Seiji said something to the both of them. He wasn’t staring daggers at anyone anymore, and simply looked on exasperatedly.

“Sorry, I already have a girlfriend.”

From the looks of it, it was the hardest kind of rejection to rebut, but Masaomi didn’t give up so easily.

“This has nothing to do with hitting on girls!”

“Hey hey, how can that have nothing to do with that?”

Mikado tried to stop him, but Masaomi wasn’t listening.

“It doesn’t matter, we’re just talking to them, not ‘hooking up’, so it doesn’t count as cheating!”

“Re...really?”

Masaomi’s sound argument had swallowed Mikado up like a flood.

But Seiji remained unconvinced, and his eyes were fixed steadfastly on Masaomi. He shook his head slightly.

“No, as long as I pay attention to other girls, it counts as betrayal.”

“What an honest guy. You can’t betray your girlfriend huh?”

“I won’t be betraying my girlfriend.”

“Huh? Then who?”

In response to Masaomi’s question, Seiji raised his head. His gaze was steady and he answered firmly.

“It’d be love.”

“Huh?”

“Doing that would be betraying my love for her. And even if I could bring myself to betray my girlfriend, I’d never be able to betray love.”

Silence.

“Oh...I see...”

The atmosphere was getting rather awkward, but Seiji was as self-assured as ever, and confidence shone, brimming in his eyes.

"...Uh...then good luck I guess!"

Masaomi, half-bewildered, held out a fist. Seiji, who was smiling, held out his own and they fist bumped.

"Heh, thanks!"

After that, Seiji continued making his way into the classroom.

As Masaomi watched his figure, full of self-assurance, disappear into the classroom, he lowered his voice and said, "There's a really passionate guy in your class."

"Uh...I guess so."



"It's totally not working..."

The two of them were at Ikebukuro West Exit Park. Although it was a famous place which had frequently appeared on television, there wouldn't really be anyone hanging around on a normal afternoon. Mikado had absolutely no interest in picking up girls, and had only come to see the place he'd seen so often on television.

Mikado realized as he stood here, that this was indeed the place that he'd seen on television. But being here in person was so different from watching it on television. He also thought about how this same place had appeared on the news, dramas, variety shows, but would give people a different vibe each time it did.

So different portrayal techniques could make such a huge difference—Mikado could only applaud this, and as he watched what Masaomi was doing, sighed.

As there were no girls around their age hanging around, Masaomi had gone and tried to pick up women in the workforce who were having their afternoon lunch break. Naturally, these members of the workforce wouldn't be interested in talking to a high schooler (and during their precious lunch break too). As he watched Masaomi's diligent efforts to do such pointless things, Mikado felt rather sorry for him.

When Masaomi finally returned to Mikado's side and heard Mikado's negative comment, he laughed and answered, "Eh? What are you talking about? It doesn't matter if I don't get the girl. The main point of hitting on them is to talk to them! And besides, you'd better listen up, when you're picking up girls, you definitely can't think thoughts like 'Impossible' or 'I can't do it'...that kind of thing! With pretty girls, if you think it's impossible, then it will be impossible. And if you think you can't do it, then you really won't be able to do it. Understand?"

"I totally don't get it."

Mikado could only respond in a low voice. He stretched.

He didn't really want to stay here any longer. Mikado had changed his mind and now wanted to go to the place where he'd always wanted to go.

"Alright then, then I'll just go to 60-Storey Street by myself today."

"What? You're not thinking of picking up girls without me are you? Doing something like in 'Onna Koroshi Abura no Jigoku' (note: the work of the playwright Chikamatsu Monzaemon. It is a bunraku play which tells the story of the prodigal son of an oil merchant, Kawachiya Yohei who goes to the female lead, Okichi to borrow money in his desperation and is turned down. He then kills her and takes the money and runs off) are you?"

"I wouldn't do that."

But Masaomi didn't really get Mikado's rebuttal, and flashed a big, defiant grin, pointed at Mikado and shouted, "Even if you wanted to, you'll only be able to cry like a baby in the face of my powers! Heh heh, in the end you'll only get to see those unfashionable ganguro girls, and some unhygienic dumpster whore might even use your body and then abandon you!"

"And what has that got to do with your powers?"

"Oi~ what a pain, you're even more annoying than houseflies in May. Let's have a contest then! Let's see who can pick up more girls!"

"Then wouldn't we have to take the girls we picked up to go pick up some more other girls?"

Masaomi was completely unaware that Mikado was being sarcastic. Then he ran in the direction of the station. Mikado decided to see what he was up to, only to see his friend walking up to a housewife who had just finished her shopping, and was even with her child.

Mikado sighed the biggest sigh of the day and made his way towards east entrance of the station by himself.

Although he got slightly lost along the way, Mikado still managed to find his way to the 60-Storey Street as he followed a more familiar path. This place was near his apartment, so he could take a walk around here till night fell, and then go home directly. As for Masaomi, if he still acted like he did in elementary school, he'd most likely forget about the contest and go home by himself.

When they were both seven, there was once when they'd played hide and seek and Masaomi had been the seeker. But he ran off halfway. Mikado had waited until night fell and finally went home crying, only to find Masaomi in his house, eating Mikado's dinner and looking very pleased with himself. He'd said, "Found you."

—Come to think of it, my hometown was filled with adventure when I was a kid. When did it all change?

After starting junior high, nothing new happened anymore, and the days grew more mundane.

Although he wanted to see the world, he didn't have a reason to leave. So he could only accept the fact that he wasn't able to change his life and could only live it quietly. Until one day, after his home got web access, his entire world changed.

The internet was brimming with all sorts of 'worlds'. 'Worlds' clashing with information you can never get in real life. It was like outside the world he was living in now, there was an even bigger one out there. And this world wasn't limited by 'distance'.

Mikado gradually became more and more immersed in the online world, till everyone thought he was

turning into some kind of hikikomori. Then one day, Mikado suddenly realized that although a life which involved merely involved the passive acceptance of information from the Net was rather unrestrictive, but he didn't know about what he should do if he were to be the one giving out information.

And when Mikado realized this, he started developing a burning interest in the outside world he'd never had before. And when he heard about how amazing and eye-catching Tokyo was, he became even more interested.

And today he was standing in that shining brilliance. Masaomi said that 'the countryside's more exciting now'. But Mikado had never thought that way before. He understood Masaomi's reason for saying that, and he had never had any intention to abandon his hometown. It was just that, thoughts of returning to his old life and giving up all this were very far from his mind.

Right now, all Mikado wanted to do was taste the sights and sounds of the city as thoroughly as possible and keep them in his body. It was like, he wanted to become one with this place.

In order to get as much of the city in him as possible, Mikado raised his head and straightened up and surveyed his surroundings.

Raira uniforms were everywhere on 60-Storey Street, and his vision was dyed by the colour of the uniforms.

"It's like a colour gang."

As he mumbled this to himself, suddenly, Mikado caught sight of a familiar face.

"Sonohara-san..."

Mikado had meant to go over to say hello, but saw that Anri was surrounded by a group of girls wearing the same uniform, and the surrounding atmosphere was relatively unfriendly. A little into a horizontal alley, there were three female students who had closed in on her till she was leaning against the wall, and seemed to be shouting some stuff he couldn't here.

Mikado wanted to know what, so he cautiously strode towards the alley. Including Anri, the four girls didn't notice Mikado approaching, and the contents of the conversation became clearly audible.

But it couldn't really be called a conversation. More of a one-sided interrogation.

"You little bitch, Harima Mika's gone missing and you're still acting all high and mighty?"

"..."

"I heard you became the class representative? Quit acting like some honour student!"

"Anyway, you were just Mika's little lackey in junior high weren't you? So what's with the class representative thing?"

The three girls took turns hurling abuse at Anri, but Anri remained silent.

—Uwa, she's being bullied?! So there are still these kinds of things still exist in Japan! And in a really clichéd way too! It's like they're acting out a scene from some old manga!

Such typical bullying wasn't really that intimidating to anyone, but since he was the class representative, he

had to do something. Although that was what Mikado thought, but he had no idea about what would be the most sensible thing to do. By now, he couldn't pretend not to have seen anything, but he was still scared of provoking those girls—

—I know. I'll just pretend I didn't notice that they were bullying Sonohara-san, and just come over smiling and say something like: "Ah, what a coincidence, Sonohara-san" and it'll be fine. Just like that! And if those girls have anything to say, I'll just act according to the circumstances!

After coming up with such an ambiguous idea, Mikado gingerly took one step forward—then, he felt a hand reach out and land on his shoulder.

"?!"

Mikado inhaled sharply, and turned, and noticed he was looking at a familiar face.

"She's being bullied? You going to stop them? How noble."

Orihara Izaya said this in relative admiration. Then with the hand he was holding Mikado's shoulder with, gave him a rough shove.

"Wa—wait?!"

Mikado's exclamation had caused the four girls to notice that there was someone else here.

"Ahahaha, what a coincidence, Sonohara-saaaaaaaan—heeeeeey...hold on!"

After shoving Mikado in front of the four girls, the person behind him finally stopped.

"What...what the hell?"

There was a hint of fear in the bully's voice. Of course, she wasn't talking to Mikado, but to Izaya who was standing behind him.

"Oh my~ that's not good. You're threatening people in broad daylight? Even if God could forgive you, the police wouldn't let you get away with it."

After saying that half-jokingly, Izaya took a few steps towards the girls, "Bullying's pretty low. It's not good. Not good at all."

"It's none of your business you old geezer!"

Perhaps it was because they were showing their true colours, or they were bluffing, but the three girls savagely glared at Izaya, with the intent of intimidating him.

"Yeah, it's none of my business."

Izaya smiled and expressed his opinions to the three girls.

"Precisely because it's none of my business, so you can get beaten up here or die a violent death here for all I care. Even if I were to be the one to beat you up or stab you here. On the other hand, I'm OK if you decide to call a twenty three year old man a geezer. Because our relationship or lack thereof will never change. All of mankind are likewise related, yet at the same time they share no relationship with each

other whatsoever."

“Huh?”

“Humans are so spirited aren’t they?”

As he said those things that normal people wouldn't be able to understand, he took another step towards the girls.

“But, I don’t make hitting girls my hobby...”

In the next second, Izaya was holding a shoulder purse in his right hand.

**“What? Eh?”**

On seeing that seemingly branded shoulder purse, one of the girls screamed. The shoulder purse which had been hanging from her shoulder had somehow ended up in that guy's hand.

The strap hanging from her shoulder had been cleanly cut somewhere near her waist.

Unlike the bewildered girls, what Mikado who was standing behind Izaya felt was in fact fear.

Because in his left hand which he'd just put behind his back, was a small, sharp knife. The problem was, even though Mikado had been watching Izaya's every move, he'd failed to notice where the knife had come from, and hadn't even seen the instant when Izaya had cut the strap with his knife.

Deftly, with his left hand behind his back, he withdrew the blade of his switchblade knife and swiftly withdrew it into the sleeve of the jacket. A single-handed manoeuvre like this was like a magic act in Mikado's eyes.

Izaya was still smiling, and pulled out a cellphone from the shoulder purse in his hand.

"So I'll make stomping on girls' cellphones my new hobby."

As the words left his mouth, Izaya flung the girl's cellphone upwards. There was a crisp thud as it landed, and the cellphones which had been covered in stickers had fallen to the ground.

“Ugh! You jerk...”

As the girl hurriedly stretched out a hand to pick it up—

And saw Izaya's foot brush past her nails and land on the cellphone.

There was a crunch which sounded like someone munching on a biscuit, and broken plastic scattered out from under his foot. He ignored the screams he heard:

"Aaaaaah—!" the girl shrieked each time as his right foot came down on the cellphone again and again. His movements were precise, like that of a machine, as he was stepping on the exact same place. His laughter too, was mechanical and played out repeatedly:

“Is this guy mental? I think he’s really gone crazy!”

“That’s so gross! Let’s get outta here!”

The girl whose cellphone was being stomped on by Izaya could only watch on dumbly, and had to be dragged off by the other two.

When he saw that they’d totally left the scene, Izaya’s laughter and movements abruptly came to a stop. As if nothing had happened at all, he turned towards Mikado. Anri hadn’t run away, and was just standing there watching Izaya and Mikado nervously.

“I’m bored. Stepping on girls’ cellphones is no longer my hobby.”

After murmuring that to himself, he smiled gently at Mikado.

“You’re really brave. You wanted to help a girl who was being bullied. Not many kids can do that.”

“Eh?”

On hearing Izaya’s compliment, Anri looked, alarmed, in Mikado’s direction. But Mikado’s idea had been pretty useless, and it was Izaya who had really helped Anri, so this left Mikado feeling rather sheepish.

But Izaya was ignoring his diffidence, and began to speak.

“Ryuugamine Mikado-kun, it’s not a coincidence that we met here. It’s because I’ve been looking for you.”

“Eh?”

Just as Mikado made to ask what he had meant by that—a convenience store trash can flew from further within the alley, and smashed directly into Izaya.

The trash can crashed to the ground with an impressive thud and finally rolled to a stop.

“Urgh!”

Izaya groaned, and lost his balance, falling to his knees. The trash can which had directly hit Izaya was made of metal, but he’d been hit with the flat part, nothing sharp, so while the impact had been rather loud, there wasn’t that much damage done.

Izaya slowly staggered to his feet, and looked in the direction from which the trash can had flown from:

“Shi...Shizu-chan?”

“Iza~ ya~ kun~”

On hearing these deliberately stretched syllables, Mikado and Anri slowly turned their heads in the same direction.

Standing there—was a young man wearing sunglasses. He was wearing a bartender outfit, complete with a bow tie. All in all, he was dressed like some kind of hotel or nightclub pimp from a previous century.

He wasn’t as tall as Simon, but could be still considered rather tall. But, looking at his lanky frame, he didn’t

seem like someone who could throw a convenience store trash can.

"Didn't I tell you not to show your face in Ikebukuro again huh? Iza~ ya~ kun~ yo~"

Comprehension dawned upon Izaya's face. And for the first time, Mikado saw that his smile had faltered:

"Shizu-chan, weren't you working at the west entrance?"

"I got fired ages ago! And besides, didn't I tell you not to call me that? How many times have I told you Iza~ ya~? I have a name, and it's Heiwajima Shizuo~"

As he relayed that warning in a low voice, a vein throbbed at his temple. There was nothing particularly special about him, and if he hadn't done anything unusual, he could easily pass off as an ordinary bartender. But his body seemed to be giving off an air of some kind of unseeable wrath. An expression of sheer 'terror', one that far exceeded the limits of fear, materialized in Mikado's eyes.

—His vein's throbbing...it's my first time seeing someone do that for real...

Such innocent thoughts were still emerging in Mikado's mind—but in the next moment, all that was left was a teenager's body in which an indescribable primeval fear had completely taken over.

Heiwajima Shizuo—the man Masaomi had mentioned who you should never make an enemy of. Before Masaomi had mentioned him, he'd added a 'besides those colour gangs and the Bosokozu' in front, so this guy could still be called an ordinary member of society. But, Mikado was sure, if there was anyone who relied on 'violence' to communicate, it had to be this guy.

It wasn't hard to understand. If anyone living in Japan saw a person like that, they'd want to stay as far away as possible. This was even more so if the person looked fearsome and dangerous. But if the person was like this man whose appearance was not particularly notable, it would be, in fact, even harder to decide how to interact with him.

"You're really troublesome, Shizu-chan. Are you still mad I pinned that crime on you?"

"No, I'm not. I just wanna punch the crap outta ya."

"Ah I'm in trouble now... so, just let me go. "

Although Izaya was asking to be spared, he'd pulled out his knife from his sleeve:

"In the face of Shizu-chan's violence...it's hard for me to deal with you, since you don't listen to logic or reason."

"Eh..."

Anri who had been spacing out, let out a gasp on seeing the silver gleam of the knife blade. Mikado on sensing her fear, began gesticulating wildly, trying his best to relay the message 'let's get outta here!' to her.



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The girl pressed her back against the wall and nodded madly, then hugging her bag tightly, took off. Mikado ran behind her until they got to the main road. Then he turned back to look.

As he did, he could only hear Shizuo's frenzied bellows coming from the alley he'd just run away from, and he saw a crowd gathered around there, drawn there by the commotion.

Then, a huge man, standing at over two metres—Simon, reached out with a hand to part the spectating crowd and strode into the alley. After that, Mikado didn't really have the heart to continue watching anymore.

Now, a very complete fear was swirling around in his chest. In this new place, where the ordinary and the extraordinary clashed, just which of that could the incident just now be called? But at least he knew for sure, it was something he definitely he shouldn't get involved in.

At the same time, Mikado had experienced for himself what it meant by 'someone he should never make an enemy of'.

—An ordinary person like him's already so scary. Then, what about triad members and the Chinese mafia?

All that violent stuff he'd seen on the Net...he'd always thought they were exaggerations. But after experiencing it all firsthand, he realized it really was that scary.

As he thought about that, Mikado felt that they'd probably run far enough and shouted to Anri:

"Hey, wait up...wait...I...can't...breathe..."

He'd given it his all, but the sad thing was, he hadn't once been able to run faster than Anri.

And such a fact had been imposed upon the youth, Ryuugamine Mikado's reality.



"Are you OK?"

Mikado had brought Anri to a nearby café, hoping that it'd help her calm down a little.

After being seated, Mikado ordered two ice cream floats, but then he realized that that seemed rather childish and regretted it.

"Um...thank you, just now...for saving me."

"Ah, it was nothing really! And besides, the person who saved you was really that Izaya guy!"

"But..."

—Ah ah ah, what am I supposed to say? If only Masaomi was here...

Although he was pretty flustered, it'd be rather weird if he didn't say anything. So Mikado opened his mouth to start a conversation:

"Were those girls just now from your middle school?"

Anri nodded in response to his question.

"I see...so, those girls were always bothering you in junior high, and there was this amazing girl called Mika who'd always stand up for you, but now that Mika's gone, they've come back to harass you again?"

After hearing Mikado's proffered conjecture, Anri froze momentarily:

"How...how did you know all that?!"

"Ah...don't worry, I just guessed based on what I put together from what you guys were talking about just now...but that's not important. This Mika person—is she the Harima Mika from our class?"

On hearing Mikado's question, Anri regained her composure and began to explain:

"Uh...yes it is that Harima Mika. Harima-san's been absent these few days hasn't she? Well that's because she hasn't been home since the day before the entrance ceremony."

"...Why?"

Isn't this something the police should be handling? Mikado thought, his eyes widened. Anri seemed to know what he was thinking and shook her head gently:

"To be exact, she's not really missing. Because Harima-san did leave a message for me and her family. She said something like 'I've gone on a journey to relieve a broken heart, don't worry about me.', or maybe it was something about which train she'd taken to where..."

"A broken heart? Did something happen to her?"

"That..."

Mikado's question had only served to make Anri prevaricate.

For whatever reason, Anri hesitantly lowered her head.

"You don't worry. I won't tell anyone. The only person I might tell, is currently busy having an affair with a woman who has kids."

Mikado had just said he'd keep quiet about it, but then he'd gone and said he might blab about it later right after that. But Anri didn't feel anything contradictory about what he'd said, and thought for a while, and

warned:

"But, can you promise me you won't be too shocked after I tell you..."

"After witnessing all that, I don't think I'll be surprised by anything anymore."

To put her at ease, Mikado gave her a bright grin. As he'd been friends with Masaomi since they were in elementary school, Mikado had developed a talent for comforting people.

Perhaps it was because Anri had been placated by Mikado's smile, because she just blurted the truth out:

"Harima-san—is a stalker."

Pfft!

Mikado's steady smile remained, but he'd spit out the melting ice cream from his mouth.

After hearing the whole story, Mikado tried to regain his composure and rearrange his thoughts.

"I see...so Harima-san was stalking...uh, sorry, I mean courting the head of welfare, Yagiri-kun, and he rejected her, so she went on a trip to relieve her broken heart?"

From what Anri had said, Harima Mika seemed to have been doing these weird things ever since she started junior high. After falling in love at first sight, she would be known to pick the lock on the door of the object of her affection's home and break into it; or she'd find out where he was going when he went out, and she'd come along, unwelcome, and she'd even tell him "Thank you for inviting me out!". She had obviously been altering the facts in her head.

Although she acted like that, but she got good grades and she was from a rich family. After enrolling in Raira Academy, she'd rented an apartment to live in by herself, and the rent was over a hundred thousand yen. Although the school had built a student dormitory nearby, but it was still a fair distance from the school, so most of the students stayed in their own homes. Some decided to live by themselves, even though they were still so young. Mikado was a good example of this. And Anri too had rented a cheap apartment a distance away from the school.

—Harima-san sure is a troublemaker.

And after meeting Seiji, she'd decided that he was her soulmate. Then, she'd turn up at his house every day. But on the day of the entrance ceremony, she'd didn't show up in school. According to Seiji, he'd firmly rejected her advances the day before the ceremony, and had even threatened to call the police. After that, Mika had stopped turning up.

As Mikado listening to Anri's recount, he was practically breaking out in cold sweat. From what she had said, Mika had sat between himself and Seiji during the entrance examination. Mikado thought that, by some strange turn of events, that 'uninvited guest' might even have ended up targeting him; and he secretly rejoiced that he hadn't saved this girl. But then again, even if he had wanted to save her, he wouldn't have been able to.

Mikado discreetly gathered these thoughts that no one would be able to guess he would have and at the same time, earnestly suggested to Anri:

"I think, you should call her."

"I could never get through...I think she switched off her phone after sending that message...and when I sent her a message asking her why she wouldn't turn on her phone, she replied that if she heard a familiar voice, she'd want to go home..."

"I see...uh...I think it's better if we analyze the situation first...no, I think to be safe, we should send her a message, and hint to her that if she doesn't turn on her phone, we'll call the police or something like that. What do you think?"

Mikado started coming up with a lot of ideas, but all of them sounded pretty lame and weren't really feasible. And the hours flew past just like that.

"So, were you Harima-san's best friend?"

"...I think so, but I don't know for sure...but we were always together. I can't really do many things right, and I'm not good at talking to people, but Harima-san helped me and she was always with me..."

After hearing what Anri had to say, Mikado felt that their relationship couldn't be so simple. He'd seen situations like this before when he was surfing the Net. And pertaining to the darkness hidden behind such things, there were a surprising number of detailed descriptions online.

"And, although Harima-san's grades could have gotten her into a better school, she still chose the same school as me...I felt really bad..."

—That's probably only because she didn't want to lose the benefits of having a convenient lackey like you by her side...

Mikado had to swallow these words which had crawled up his throat back down. Deep down, he was glad Masaomi wasn't here. If this was an Internet chatroom, he'd have just unreservedly told her this flat out.

—But, maybe it'd better if I tell her.

As he thought that, Mikado began battling with his conscience. On seeing Mikado subconsciously averting his gaze, Anri's mouth curved into a smile:

"It's OK, I know."

At having been seen through, Mikado frantically asked, "K-Know what?"

"I know she was just using me to look good. So, I was using her as well. I thought life would be easier with her around, that I couldn't live without depending on her. The only reason I volunteered to be a class representative was because Harima-san would have wanted to become one, and I decided to do it in her stead before she came back—"

Anri's words cleared all of Mikado's doubts. So that time in class, when she turned in his direction, she wasn't really looking at anyone, but at Mika's vacant table. And Masaomi had been sitting there.

As Mikado made sense of this, Anri went ahead and stated her opinion:

"But, it was mainly for my own satisfaction. I thought maybe if I became a class representative, I could surpass her...I'm horrible, aren't I?"

Mikado didn't wait for her to finish before throwing out an icy remark:

"In my opinion, I think what's horrible is telling people all that."

"\_\_"

"It sounds like you're trying to get someone to forgive you. In my opinion, it's a good thing that you want to surpass Harima-san, so you should hold your head high and be more confident."

After spilling out everything that had been in his mind, Mikado began to regret it greatly. He felt that he'd said too much. Perhaps it'd because they'd hit it off, and he'd been getting more tense as they'd talked, and thus hadn't been able to restrain himself and poured out all the thoughts he'd normally keep to himself.

He was afraid Anri would get angry, so he withdrew his head nervously and looked up at her. But she didn't seem angry or upset.

"You're right...thank you."

On seeing her slightly bewildered smile, Mikado thought about it seriously.

—To reduce someone like her to the role of a lackey...just how beautiful is this Harima person?

Surely it couldn't be just because she was taking advantage of Anri's personality?

Mikado couldn't help but wonder.

"That...thank you very much for today."

As they parted ways, Anri bowed her head a few times and thanked him. Mikado had offered to foot the bill for both of them, but Anri had declined, and so they paid for their own food. Streams of dark shadows inclined from 60-Storey Street, dyeing the sky a dark blue, and shrouded everything above them.

"No problem, don't worry about it. Although today's the first time we've talked, we're going to be class representatives together, so I hope we work well together."

After Mikado finished, a gentle smile crossed Anri's face and she nodded:

"I actually knew about you a long time ago, Ryuugamine-kun."

"Huh?"

"When I was handing in my matriculation form, there was a checklist on the receptionist's desk. I saw your name on it and I thought it was pretty cool...and then someone came in and checked it off..."

What was with this strange turn of events? An uneasy foreboding hung in his chest and Mikado answered with a casual, "Is that so?"

"And...today, that person saved me..."

—Wait...wait a minute.

Mikado faltered. Doesn't this a lot like what happened between Harima Mika and Yagiri Seiji? The girl before him had an indecipherable smile across her face.

—Eh? It can't be! This is bad...I don't want a stalker...but I guess it's OK, since she's so cute. No, wait, that can't be right? What if she stabs me with a knife?! Or she might set my house on fire, or take my parents hostage...but, since she's got a good personality, it's OK right? Wait wait, no, stalkers don't have good personalities...but that's not entirely unacceptable either—

Even after thinking this over and over again in his brain for three seconds, Mikado still had no idea what to say to his classmate standing in front of him.

On seeing Mikado's strained expression, Anri smiled:

"I was kidding!"

"Eh..."

"Don't worry, I'm not a stalker. It would only cause trouble if someone like me was following you around."

When he realized Anri had been merely teasing him, Mikado felt pretty embarrassed for having been seen through, and was plagued with a sense of guilt that far exceeded that embarrassment.

"...Sorry."

"Eh? Ah, it's alright! I was the one teasing you, you don't need to apologise!"

Anri hadn't thought that Mikado would suddenly apologise to her, and she looked rather alarmed under those glasses.

He was at a loss at what to do now, so Mikado could only force something out:

"Then I'll see you tomorrow—right?"

"Um then I hope we'll work well together from tomorrow onwards."

—Sonohara-san can be pretty sly sometimes...but she's a good person.

After parting ways with her, Mikado thought this on his way home.

So she wasn't as mysterious as he'd thought her to be, and was simply not good at dealing with people.

Masaomi and I could very well become like them if I'm not careful. That's because I was only able to come to this new world with Masaomi's help.

Mikado shook his head vigorously, and told himself that he shouldn't think like that.

Then, Mikado thought of Harima-san who had been rejected by the person she liked and then had gone missing and murmured to himself, "Looks like she was dumped pretty harshly. But if she's just given up like that, then maybe she's not that crazy a stalker..."

But, based on what Anri had said, she'd forced open the lock of the house of a guy she merely liked and broken in, and had done so when she was in junior high. Would someone like that really just give up on

their ‘soulmate’ just because they were threatened with the neighbourhood police?

When he realized he was starting to get seriously concerned a stalker girl he’d never met before, Mikado raised his head, and sighed deeply.

—Sigh. Even though I look forward to unconventional things, I don’t want to get involved with something like this.

Mikado who had lapsed into a bout of depression decided to find a way to lift his spirits. So he decided to go to the hundred yen store before going home.

—And then he heard a sound that had everything to do with logic and reality.

It was the roar of the engine that sounded so much like an animal’s caterwaul. That intermittent low roar sounded especially eager today.

“It’s the black bike!”

He didn’t think he’d be able to hear the sound of its engine even beside this small station. Mikado couldn’t restrain his curiosity. Unthinkingly, he ran in the direction of the sound.

Based on the volume of the sound, he just needed to turn into one more intersection and he’d be able to see it. Unable to suppress his roiling emotions, Mikado swerved sharply into an alley—

And with that, Mikado began playing out a scene from an old manga.

♂♀

“...Whoa whoa, so you’re saying that the beautiful girl you bumped into on the corner was being chased by same bad guy on a motorbike and you saved her, and she’s even lost her memory—and now you expect me to believe this dream of yours which in many ways isn’t very dreamy at all?”

“But it’s true!”

“But there’s something off...why did she bump into you instead of me?”

In the room that was hardly three square metres large, Mikado and Masaomi were seriously discussing this.

This was Mikado’s apartment, and the only electrical appliances in the room were a personal computer with an in-built television and radio tuner and an electric rice cooker.

The room Mikado had rented within this apartment was considered relatively cheap. The cheapest would be the one next door which was just one and a half square metres. As the cheapest apartment was already occupied, Mikado then had no choice but to rent this slightly more expensive one. The person living next door was a photographer, but as he was always rushing to attend interviews from morning to night, so he wasn’t home most of the time.

Mikado had originally thought that since he wasn’t home most of the time, he should have just let him have that room. But now he realized, a room that was just a little bigger than two square metres was already quite tiny. Thank goodness he hadn’t gotten the one that was one and a half square metres large. And especially after meeting with a situation like this, Mikado was especially thankful for that.

To Mikado who was in a tizzy because of the ‘situation’ before him, Masaomi said calmly and smoothly:

“It’d be better if this made you late for school in the morning. And it’d be ‘marvellous’ if she was a transfer student. And if she was the princess of some country as well as your childhood sweetheart then it’d be ‘perfect’!”

Mikado had no idea what Masaomi was talking about so he held his chin and sank deep into thought.

—I really like extraordinary things, but if they manage to escalate into a situation like this, then maybe I might be dreaming.

Or more precisely, he wished for all this to be nothing but a dream.

Masaomi continued spouting nonsense to the pensive Mikado:

“Did you notice the stuff I just said just now was all really clichéd?”

“I think it’s even worse when you have to point it out.”

As Mikado thought about the words which he remembered saying some time ago, he glanced at the girl lying between them. Although he wasn’t sure of her age, Mikado supposed that she was probably a little older than him.

She was sleeping peacefully. She was wearing a plain nightgown, and she looked like she’d just escaped from a hospital or something. At that time—Mikado had banged into her, he’d heard her utter the words “Help me!”. And in Mikado’s disorientation and confusion, he saw a black bike heading straight for them.

As for what happened after that, Mikado wasn’t exactly clear. He still had a vague memory of simply grabbing the girl’s hand and making a mad dash for it into the station. They’d run down to the underpass, and as the bike seemed to have stopped pursuing them, they left from a different exit and bolted to Mikado’s apartment. But—

“Not only has she lost her memory, but she also refuses to let me call the police...I really don’t know what to do.”

“Well...let’s just do what we can,” Masaomi finished.

He watched the sleeping girl and said:

“Hey, she’s really gorgeous. She doesn’t look Japanese though...oh yeah, is she really Japanese?”

“Well she could speak Japanese...”

The two of them decided to wait until tomorrow and would see what they could do based on what the girl said. The right thing to would have been to call the police, even though it was against her will. But Mikado didn’t want to do that.

It was a little old-fashioned, but these developments would be extremely orthodox for a manga or movie. Mikado believed that this was indeed the extraordinariness he’d wished for.

The only thing which worried Mikado, was in fact, the probability that the black biker might have

recognised him. He'd been so preoccupied with running home, he hadn't even thought about why the black biker was so bent on chasing the girl. What if he had to live the rest of his life being enemies with the all-too-real 'urban legend'—the black biker?

Weary of the mundane normality, eager for change. This was probably the reason was harbouring this girl whose origins were still a mystery.

But, if he wanted to leave 'normality', then he might have to put himself in relative danger.

—The danger I'm facing now, is it that black bike?

After seeing Masaomi off, he was still trembling from thoughts like that.

And, there was something Mikado had hidden from Masaomi.

The girl had a bandage wrapped around her neck. At first there didn't seem to have been anything on her neck, but after taking her home and examining closely, he thought it was too conspicuous. So he'd wrapped it up with a bandage for her before Masaomi came.

On her neck—there was a scar from a sutured wound, which 'encircled her entire neck'.

It was like, after her neck had been sawn off, a head had been forcefully reattached to it.

**第九章**

**Chapter 9**

**ダブルビートン**

**傷娘編**

# Chapter 9: Double Heroine—The Scarred Girl Volume

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Let us go back in time a bit.

While Mikado and Anri were walking into the café, one of the ‘chess pieces’ had started moving on the streets.

Yagiri Pharmaceuticals·Research Facility

In the meeting room of the sixth research facility, the sound of a forceful blow on something was heard.

“You said she escaped...explain yourself!”

Yagiri Namie’s fist struck the table, effectively overturning a mug of coffee. Coffee was now pooling quickly across the table’s surface. The freshly brewed coffee was scalding Namie’s hand, but she hardly flinched, and only her fist was quivering slightly from her rage and anxiety.

“If the police find out about ‘that’, we’ll be finished!”

She swept her gaze, both fiery and restless with anxiety, across the faces of her subordinates.

“So she was only pretending to be good. She was just looking for an opportunity to make a run for it the whole time...”

She bit her lip tightly in an attempt to suppress her anger, which caused her lips to be stained with a red colour that was even darker than her lipstick.

“...Forget it, get all ‘subordinates’ that don’t have anything to do at the moment to look for her. No need to keep a low profile now, just do everything you can to search for her. If any problems crop up, let them take care of it themselves.”

“Should they be refrained from injuring the target?” one of the subordinates beside Namie asked calmly.

She thought a little, and then answered his query in a clear voice:

“It’s a shame...but since it’s come to this, I don’t care if she dies. Just bring her back here.”



As he looked towards his sister’s erect research facility, Yagiri Seiji sighed deeply.

—Ah, so this is love...love that just causes you to lose control.

The first time Seiji had met ‘her’, had been something that happened five years ago. He’d only been a ten-

year-old kid then and with under his sister's 'guidance', he'd been exposed to his uncle's 'secret'.

'She'd' been in a glass jar—and looked like something out of a fairytale he'd seen when he was little, like a sleeping beauty who was yearning for her prince in her dreams. Although she was a head, Seiji did not feel the slightest fear or repulsion towards her, and instead had been completely bewitched by her exquisite charm.

And as Seiji grew up day by day, he began to develop a sense of rationality. But this so called rationality was completely defined by 'her', and his psyche was gradually being encroached by thoughts of 'her'.

But, this wasn't because the head had any demagogic intentions, nor was it because the head was emanating strange electromagnetic waves or pheromones. The head was simply alive. The youth, Yagiri Seiji, had merely been doing as he wished, and had eventually fallen for 'her' completely.

Just like how Yagiri Namie was in pursuit of her brother's love. Her brother, like her, was seeking love from a silent head that did not speak.

It was purely this love, that instigated him to do what he had.

When his sister had taken 'her' away on the grounds of research, Seiji had thought—I'm going to let her leave that glass jar. I'm going to set her free. I want her to have the whole world.

Seiji believed that this was 'her' wish, and then one day, the long-awaited opportunity came. He stole his sister's security card, familiarized himself with the security guards' patrol route and had taken care of them with a stun gun. Seiji did not believe what he had done was wrong at all. In his heart, he only wanted to see 'her' joyous expression.

But—even when he'd successfully brought 'her' outside, 'she' still did not open her eyes.

The head did not reciprocate his love. But, Seiji believed it was because his love for her was not deep enough. He told himself this, and he staunchly believed that his one-sided love for her would be able to link them together for eternity.

—Love that one once had and then lost. How could it have moved someone like this?

As he recited that line which sounded like something a middle schooler who was yearning for a taste of romance would write, Seiji took marched resolutely towards the research facility.

"Sis told me to leave it to her...but how could I let my 'girlfriend' be alone? And what's more, even if it was for research, she might have been cut open and had her brain examined...the poor thing."

Seiji groused about this without understanding the focal point of the situation at hand. He arrived on the road where the entrance of the research facility was:

"If I'd known earlier, I wouldn't have given her to Sis. I should have objected. I have to let Sis and Uncle know how much we love each other so they'll understand it someday. And if they don't, I'll just elope with her."

His determination was hardly dubious, and could be likened to an aristocrat who had fallen for a girl of a less than desirable background. For all anyone knew, he appeared to simply be a high school student who did things rather spiritedly. But if they knew that his girlfriend was a head which appeared to be a deep slumber, they'd immediately think that this ordinary behavior was in fact, unconventionally conspicuous.

And the scary part was—till today, the existence of thoughts of ‘Harima Mika’ had been completely erased from Seiji’s mind. He’d killed her, but had now completely forgotten what she looked like, or what her voice sounded like. To Seiji, everything he had done was to get rid of an obstacle that had gotten in the way of his path of love. How could a boy who lived for love remember each and every obstacle he’d eliminated?

“If I have to, I’ll just steal Sis’s card and break into the research facility again.”

As Seiji contemplated something as dangerous as that, a van of some cleaning company drove away from the research facility.

But Seiji knew, they weren’t really employees of a cleaning company. They were the ‘subordinates’ from the research facility, and were a group of ‘people-snatching’ guys. The people they kidnapped were not made to do immoral stuff, but were used as test subjects in illegal human experimentation.

And Seiji knew, the reason the facility had started hiring these underlings to kidnap people, was in fact to do research on ‘her’. After kidnapping them, they’d experiment on them with her cells, DNA information or bodily fluids. Why did they have to do all that extreme stuff that kept spreading around town just because of a ‘head’ that was simply existing? Seiji hadn’t understood at all at first, but he later guessed that it was probably because of the pressure put on by ‘Nebula’ which was trying to take over Yagiri Pharmaceuticals.

Although it was called human experimentation, it didn’t involve cruel actions like cutting people open. It merely involved administering a dose of anesthetic and maintaining the subject in a fake-death state and conducting various experiments on them so that data could be collected. Then they’d be dumped in the park after they were done with them. The targets had been strictly those people whom no one would notice were gone even if they went missing and fortunately, there were no illegal aliens who had the protection of underworld triads either—but there were rumours that some of the ‘subordinates’ of the subordinates had, in order to achieve their own ends, kidnapped some runaway girls and trafficked them.

—They’re really some immoral bastards. What do they take human life for?

Seiji seemed to have forgotten about what he had done, and glared indignantly at the van which had just left. Then he saw someone climbing up the back of the van.

Clinging on desperately to the back of the van was that—no, that person’s neck had a scar around it—

And sitting above that scar, was his beloved—dear girlfriend.



On the main road before the train station, a motorbike with no headlights cruised soundlessly past.

It sped right past the front of the police station, but the officers inside did not notice the motorbike which did not make a sound. And even on the streets, there were only a few people who noticed it because there was no purr of the engine from the motorbike, and looked back because they found it weird. It steered clear of the station, keeping a distance as it sped forth, so it didn’t run into any obstacles. Its owner was totally focused on one thing, and that was to ensure that her steed with no headlights wouldn’t be the cause of a traffic accident. So when she wanted to accelerate, she would make sure ‘the engine roared’, to alert those around her of her presence.

The headless horse—Coiste Bodhar's caterwaul was indeed intimidating, and now even as a motorcycle, it remained just as so. But, there would occasionally be weirdoes who liked an engine sound like that, and instead of getting out of the way, they'd cluster together to have a look. The Dullahan was still a little uncomfortable with the fact that there were so many weird people in this place, but as the years passed, she eventually got used to freely travelling around in this city like this. But unbeknownst to her, this had also made her a living 'urban legend'.

When she didn't have any jobs, Celty would just roam the streets like this, in search of her 'head'—but then again it was impossible for a head to just randomly appear on the streets. So in actuality, it was just she was just going for a pointless spin. She knew that very well, but she couldn't just sit there and do nothing, so she would just roam around on the streets like that.

After coming to Japan, what surprised her the most, was that beside herself, she entirely could not detect the presence of demons, spirits and things like that. As she passed the park or the entrance of the 60-Storey Street, she'd occasionally sense the presence of 'something' in the trees growing on the curb, but she had never met anything like that with a physical form. In her homeland, Ireland, she'd been able to sense many 'fellows'. Since the situation here was like this, she should have approached her fellow Dullahans for help when she had lost her head. But it was useless now. The immigration checks now were much stricter than twenty years ago, and it would be extremely difficult to sneak out of the country. It was impossible to leave Japan without a 'head'.

But either way, in the environment she was in now, she could not sense the presence of any 'supernatural phenomenon'.

—Is this how the human world is? Is it like this in New York and Paris? I might have to make a trip to the forests in Hachioji the next time...no, maybe I should just try searching in places like Hokkaido or Okinawa...

That was what she thought, but a headless person like her wouldn't be able to go anywhere without Shinra accompanying her. Places where people wouldn't get suspicious if you wore a helmet all the time were painfully few.

Moreoever, even if she wanted to leave Tokyo, she should at least wait until she found her head. What if she went somewhere else, and came back—only to find that the presence of her head had vanished. It would be like putting the cart before the horse.

Using a map to ascertain the area in which she could feel her head's presence, she found that it was indeed mainly based in Ikebukuro. But, since there was no way to examine that area in greater detail, she could only search for it step by step.

But even as she searched, the most she could do was to ride her motorbike around like that. If there was something suspicious, she'd look up stuff on the Net about it. And after she got more information about it, she'd ask Shinra and Izaya to verify it for her.

Obviously—there had been no reliable news whatsoever in the twenty years she had been here.

Celty knew in her heart that today would probably be another fruitless day. Then she thought of what Shinra had said before.

(Give it up.)

But she just couldn't do it. Indeed, she was content with her life now, but in order to suppress those

writhing feelings within her—to genuinely achieve inner peace, she had to get her head back.

The traffic light turned red, and the noiseless motorbike soundlessly slowed to a stop. And just then, she heard someone call out to her.

“Oh, it’s you Celty.”

Celty shifted her attention and vision in the direction of the voice, and standing there, was a man in a bartender outfit.

It was the man Shinra dubbed as ‘Ikebukuro’s Most Inappropriately Named Person’ —Heiwajima Shizuo.

“Can you keep me company for a bit?”

Celty had spent twenty years in Ikebukuro, and she’d known Shizuo for a long time. Of course, he had no clue about her true identity or her gender, but he didn’t particularly care anyway. As the green light flashed, Celty swerved to the left into an alley and found a place to park.

Shizuo’s shirt had been slashed by a knife a few times, and looked as if he’d just had a brawl with someone.

The only person who could leave so many knife marks on Shizuo’s shirt, unfortunately, was Orihara Izaya. And he verified this fact himself later on.

“That bastard Izaya ran over to Ikebukuro again...I almost flattened him, but Simon butted in.”

Based on how he spoke to her, one might mistake Shizuo for someone who acted true to his name, someone who lived his life normally. However this was only because Celty didn’t talk.

Shizuo always got angry over the most trivial of matters. He was easily irritated by what others said, and would even get enraged sometimes. The more the other party confused him with words, the more unreasonable he would become. Celty had seen how Shizuo spoke with with Shinra. It was just like a stick of dynamite on the verge of being triggered.

Shizuo hated sophisticated people the most, and his relationship with Orihara Izaya had always been like that of oil and water. Similarly, Izaya didn’t like people who didn’t listen to reason very much either, so both of them were in a situation of mutual dislike.

Before Izaya moved to Shinjuku, the two of them would fight daily on 60-Storey Street. And Simon would always appear to stop them and drag them to the sushi store where he worked where he would force them to make up.

And just before he moved to Shinjuku, Izaya went and stirred up some trouble and pinned it on Shizuo as something to remember him by. Obviously Izaya didn’t make any blunders that might lead the police to him.

And from then on, the rivalry between them became one that had absolutely no room for compromise, and the moment one of them strayed into the other’s territory, a clash was guaranteed. But their clashes were usually just scuffles, and especially with Izaya’s kind of mediation, nothing too extreme really happened before. It was just—

“I’m not like Kadota, Yumasaki and the others. I’m always alone no matter what I do. I guess Izaya’s the same as me. That bastard probably doesn’t have anyone he can call a friend. But, it’s not like I want to be

alone all the time. Actually, I really want to interact with people, even if it's just a formality or something."

As Shizuo continued grousing, Celty who had been merely shaking her helmet—suddenly nodded.

One was a bartender wearing sunglasses, and the other was a 'shadow' wearing a helmet. In the eyes of an outsider, this combination would have seemed rather bizarre. But the people on the streets merely glanced at them as they passed, and did not take a special interest in it.

Shizuo looked like he'd had quite a bit to drink, probably at Simon's sushi place.

Celty had thought it was probably not nice to just leave him alone like this, and had thus decided to lend a ear to his grousing. Shizuo then suddenly asked—

"But...that flea Izaya, why did he suddenly decide to come here?"

Celty knew the answer. The reason Izaya came to Ikebukuro was because of that twisted hobby of his. But, even though she knew the answer, Celty had a question of her own.

—The things that happened two days in a row, yesterday and today, were all pretty strange.

It was impossible for an information broker based in Shinjuku to have nothing to do all day. He had even been willing to risk the fact that Shizuo would be here the whole time. It looked like he probably had another motive.

"Which reminds me, I think I saw that bastard talking with some brat from Raira..."

Shizuo suddenly stopped himself in mid-sentence, and turned to look at a commotion in the crowds.

"What's going on?"

After hearing Shizuo say that, Celty turned her attention towards it. A few people who had been walking on the streets were all watching whatever it was intently. The thing they were looking at, was a girl.

On the main road right before them, there was a girl in a sleeping gown. She looked a little over ten, and was walking unsteadily across the dusk-veiled street.

She looked like she was injured. As if she had just escaped from a period of severe imprisonment.

Standing in the position she was now, Celty didn't want to draw too much attention to herself, but because she was worried that a human life might be at stake, she decided to temporarily brush her principles aside and focus on observing the girl's condition.

—In the next moment, she was completely overwhelmed by astonishment.

She still could recall the vague memory of her face, which had been reflected on the lake and the glass windows of the villagers' houses.

The dark hair, as dark as midnight, which just slightly covered her eyes. The very face that had been etched into her heart—was sitting on the neck of that girl on the street who was wearing a nightgown.

Celty's emotions suddenly exploded and it felt like they were bursting out of her. Shizuo on seeing all of this, became curious about what was happening, and made his way towards the girl.

Celty rushed to the limping girl's side, grabbed her hand and pulled her so that she was facing her directly. The girl gasped, wild with terror. She screamed hysterically, trying to shove Celty's hands away.

"Ah...aaaahhhhhh! Noooo! Aaaahhhhhh!"

The attention of the passers by landed on the two of them, but Celty was too overwhelmed by emotion to care. She only wanted to tell the girl that all she wanted to do was look at her face properly. But in a situation like this, she wasn't even able to take her PDA out to tell her.

"Oi, calm down. We're not bad people."

Shizuo strode in their direction, trying to help Celty clear up the misunderstanding. To calm the girl down, Shizuo had tried to put his hand on her shoulder. To think—

Stab.

The momentary impact of something penetrated his waist. There was a feeling of great discomfort at the area below his buttock, around his thigh. And at the same time, he felt a mixture of coolness and warmth seeping into his trousers.

"Huh...?"

Shizuo turned around, and saw a youth wearing a suit jacket bent down behind him, stabbing something into his thigh.

It was one of those ballpoint pens that could be bought and found almost everywhere. Taking a closer look, he saw that the teenager's bag was half open. The pen he had stabbed Shizuo's thigh with had probably been taken from inside it.

"Huh...?"

"Let her go!"

The teenager's yell had caused Celty to turn around—and when she noticed the bloody incident that had happened between them, she felt a little stunned.

The girl in the nightgown took advantage of this opening and yanked away her hand from Celty's and made a desperate dash for a small alley.

Celty had initially intended to chase after her, but forced herself to stop, and turned towards Shizuo whose thigh had been stabbed by two ballpoint pens. And not forgetting the youth in the suit jacket behind him, who was holding a third pen.

The surrounding onlookers had begun whispering to each other, and some of them hurriedly backed away. There were people who had totally no fear of the situation, and pretended that they hadn't seen anything and simply walked past; some hadn't even noticed anything, and merely passed them quickly; there were some who had even whipped out their cellphones to take a picture. There were two police stations nearby, and all this was happening right between them, around three hundred metres away from each.

The youth in the suit jacket glanced at the spectating crowd from the corner of his eye, gripping the third ballpoint pen in his hand, and looked in the direction the girl in the nightgown had fled towards.

Then he added:

"Good..."

Celty felt a little suspicious about what he'd said, and made to interrogate him when Shizuo shot out a hand.

His palm stopped right in front of her helmet, and he was smiling as if nothing had happened:

"Ah, I'm OK. Luckily I haven't sobered up, so it doesn't hurt that much. You go on ahead, I'm alright. I don't get really what's going on, but you need to go after that girl right?"

Then, Shizuo folded up his shades, slipped them into his breast pocket and slapped his cheek with one hand.

"Heh heh, I've always wanted to say this: 'You go on ahead, leave this to me!'"

This line was usually said when one was facing a powerful enemy, but in this case, it was more likely that the student might be the one losing his life—although this was what Celty thought, she decided to accept Shizuo's good intentions anyway. Besides, what if they all got detained by the police? At least Shizuo could be identified as the victim, whereas she had no idea how she was going to address herself in front of them.

Celty clasped her palms together and nodded her thanks. Just like that, she had mounted her black bike and prepared to go after that girl. At that time, shouts of things like "It's the black bike!", "Are you serious?!" erupted from the spectating crowd. And her beloved steed had lustily, as if with the intent of scaring the crowds into submission, roared into the night that had enveloped the ground.

"Wait!"

The youth in the suit jacket had attempted to chase after her.

"No, *you* wait."

Shizuo forcefully grabbed the back of the collar of the suit jacket, and yanked the teenager up.

"Is that girl your girlfriend?"

"That's right! She's my soulmate!"

The teenager who was struggling furiously to get free—Yagiri Seiji answered with utmost certainty.

"...Why is she like that?"

Shizuo kept his cool, wanting to hear his answer.

"I don't know!"

"Then what's her name?"

"How should I know?"

In that moment, the crowd who were watching from a distance felt a sudden chill. A throbbing nerve had suddenly appeared on the bartender's face, which had been relatively calm from the start. This made the temperature of the surroundings drop to freezing point.

It was if at the exact moment when all the onlookers experienced that sudden iciness, all the heat in the surroundings had been absorbed and all of it been imposed upon his fury—the Heiwajima volcano was about to erupt.

"WHAAAAT WAAAAAS THAAAT HUUUH—!"

And then the youth's body was flying in mid-air.

"No way?!" the onlooking crowd had exclaimed.

Because Shizuo had flung Seiji's entire body towards the main road without an ounce of hesitation.

Seiji's body crashed into a delivery truck which had stopped for a red light. If it had been a green light, Seiji might even have had already left the world. Another staggering fact was that the distance Seiji had just flown was could hardly be called humane. This caused a sharp inhalation of icy air from everyone in the onlooking crowd.

"I asked you what that girl you said you like's name was, and you say you don't know? Isn't that a little irresponsible? Huh?"

After smashing into that truck and slumping onto the ground after that, Shizuo had stretched out a hand to once again grab him by the front of his shirt and jammed him against his own chest.

But, even though his body hurt so much it was going numb, Seiji kept his gaze steady and fearlessly glared at Shizuo's whose expression could be comparable to that of a monster:

"Liking someone...has nothing to do with their name!"

"Huh?"

Shizuo's eyes flashed, but Seiji did not falter.

"The let me ask you, on what grounds can you claim that a girl whose name you don't even know as your soulmate?"

"—Because I love her! There's no other reason aside from that! It's absolutely impossible to describe love with words."

Seiji raised the hand holding the pen high up, and faced Shizuo who was staring intently at him, and looked as if he was thinking about something.

"That's why, I'm going to prove it with my actions! I'll protect her, and that's all there is to it!"

The pen came down towards his face, but Shizuo used his free hand to block it. Although at that time, his eyes were bloodshot with rage, the words from his mouth had been gentle:

"I like you a lot more than Izaya."

Shizuo yanked the pen away from Seiji's hand, and slowly pulled him away from him with his other hand.

"So, I'll just teach you a little lesson, and I'll let you go."

As he said that, he yanked Seiji in one shot back towards him, delivering a harsh blow to his forehead with his own head.

Following the sonorous clash of skulls, Seiji slumped and keeled over on the ground. Just like that.

Shizuo left Seiji there and turned to leave.

"Ah, this is gonna bleed if I pull it out...I think I'll get a Band Aid first. No, I think an adhesive will do..."

Shizuo muttered this to himself as he got off the main road and walked in the direction of an alley. The onlooking crowd parted as he did, and everyone tried to avoid him, backing far away. Then, those who had been watching disappeared into the endlessly surging crowds one by one. And finally, everything had returned to normal, as if nothing had happened at all, leaving behind Seiji, who was staggering to his feet, and a few stragglers who continued watching him discreetly from some far-off corner.

"Damn it..."

Enduring the excruciating pain in his head, Seiji slowly took a few steps forth:

"I have to find her...have to save her..."

Seiji lurched forth. Just then, two policemen came to his side.

"You OK?"

"Can you walk?"

The two policemen had rushed over when a report came in that a fight had broken out there. But when they arrived at the scene, they only saw Seiji there and nothing else that evidenced that anything had taken place. And as Shizuo hadn't pulled out the pens in his leg, the blood had merely seeped into his trousers and hadn't dripped onto the ground.

"I'm fine. I just fell over, that's all."

"I'm sorry, but you'd better come down to the precinct with us."

"We'll just ask you a few questions, and besides is pretty dangerous for you to be walking around on the streets like this."

Even though these two officers were doing all this voluntarily, but Seiji didn't have the time to comply with them.

Just as Seiji started wracking his brains for a way to find the girl, he heard the roar of the black bike from earlier.

Seiji swiftly raised his head, and looked in the direction where the roar had come from. The sight of the black bike about to speed into the underground passageway entered his eyes—as well her, in the nightgown.

“Yama-san, it’s that bike!”

“That’s not our problem, and we can’t do anything either. Leave it to the traffic police.”

Completely ignoring the conversation between the two officers, Seiji desperately fixed his gaze on the girl.

It looked that there was someone holding her hand and running down the subway with her, and that person holding her hand was—

“Ryuugamine...Mikado?”

When he realized the person holding the girl’s hand, was in fact the class president, Seiji shot forward.

“Ah, wait up! Don’t move!”

“Hey stop it!”

The two officers restrained Seiji, and he struggled fiercely. If he had been at full strength, he might even have been able to shove them away from him, but after having his head skull nearly cracked open by Shizuo, his body no listened to him, and his strength wouldn’t come.

“Let me go! I said let me go! She’s just there! Right before my eyes! Let me go let me go! Damn it, why does everyone have to get in the way of my love! What have I done wrong? What did she do wrong? Let me go let me go let me go—!”

“So, you’re saying your head was attached to another body which was walking on the streets. And when you tried to grab hold of her, a high schooler intervened. And when you began chasing her, another high schooler appeared and ran off with that body—you expect me to believe something like this?”

In Shinra’s apartment, Shinra who was clad in white was gesticulating deliberately, waving his hands around. Unaware of his pretentious bumbling, Celty feebly let her fingers climb across the keyboard.

*I’m not forcing you to believe me.*

“No, I believe you, because you’ve never lied before.”

Shinra’s voice resonated from the other room, as if trying to alleviate Celty’s unhappiness.

“He he, Confucius said: there are three kinds of friends that do good, and you’re my only friend that does good! With someone like you who’s straight, sincere and knows so much as my life partner, it’ll be my greatest pride!”

*Who said anything about life partners?*

Celty typed that retort out, but her actions did not seem to show any disgust for Shinra.

“Maybe I should change the three good things to diligence, friendship and victory!”

*Listen, when you talk to me, at least read what I wrote at the bottom of the screen!*

Celty typed that out, seemingly irritated, but the doctor continued rambling on by himself:

"Then in response to your wishes, I will put in my most diligent effort so I can achieve victory in the competition that is the life I am leading with you!"

*What about friendship?*

"Just add in a 'while beginning as friends'."

Celty didn't really have the intention to continue humouring Shinra like this. So she lightly shrugged her shoulders, and began plan what she would do tomorrow.

*Either way, I can't just give up like this. It took me so long to find my head. And, from their uniform, they're probably Raira Academy students. Tomorrow, I'm going to station myself at the school gate and see if I can find that boy.*

As he read the long string of words on the screen, Shinra asked in disbelief:

"And after you find him, what do you plan to do?"

*Do you even need to ask? Of course I'll ask him about my head.*

"And after you ask him, what do you plan to do?"

*What do you mean what I plan to do?*

She was in the middle of typing that, when Celty suddenly understood what Shinra had meant.

"I mean, what do you intend to do to your 'head'? It's even found a body now, and it could only scream when it saw you."

Celty was unable to answer, and her fingers froze on the keyboard.

"It's very likely that your head is now a whole person, and had even made friends with a high schooler. What can you do to a 'head' like that? Do you plan to, for your own sake, separate that head from its body? If so, wouldn't that be a little cruel?"

After a period of silence—Celty realized that she was trembling. Everything was just as Shinra had said. It was as if she had become a total stranger to the 'head'. Although it might have been because she was wearing a biker suit—but even so, this probably meant that the head had manifested a personality that was completely different from the 'personality' she possessed as of now.

—If she wanted her whole head back, then she would have to separate it from that body. But, now her head had gotten a body and had become a complete being. And would it really be advisable for her to separate them like this? But, if she could just convince her head to come back to her, it could even be a way to 'get back her head', but she probably won't get anything done by doing things this way. Besides, although Celty's body had no signs of aging, what would her head even look like now? Would it still retain its youthfulness even after more than a decade? Even if it wouldn't age on its own, would anything change if she got it back now?

Before she made the final conclusion, Celty asked the most fundamental question.

*Why did my head attach itself to another body 'that's not mine'?*

"Ah you see, for someone like me who hasn't seen it with his own eyes to say something is essentially futile. In other words, I can only speculate. If you want to hear my speculations, I'll be glad to tell them to you."

Shinra thought for a bit, and brightly relayed his bone-chilling conclusion:

"Maybe it found someone who looked like she had your build, and just attached itself to them."

Celty had indeed thought of this before as well, but hearing someone just say it out in front of her had caused her to sink into a silence. Then, Shinra went on revealing more of his conclusions to Celty who was still deep in thought about her head:

"Or perhaps, it could even be on a national scale. It sounds a lot like exaggeration, but maybe some covert military research unit got a hold of your 'head'. And after doing various experiments on it, they managed to create an army of undead soldiers. Thus, just by utilizing the cells from your head, they managed to create a clone of you, and in order to preserve your Dullahan memories, they attached your head to the clone—do you think it's possible?"

*You could get a Golden Raspberry Award for that.*

Celty decided to ignore most of Shinra's suggestions, and declared his apparent scriptwriting abilities worthy to compete in an awards ceremony for bad movies. But, there was just one part—which was the part about the research unit that was very likely.

"Alright, since you think cloning is going a little overboard, maybe they just found a body and stuck it on. Or maybe, they just kidnapped a live person, and attached your living head onto them right after they killed them. It's definitely possible. But logically speaking, this is all nonsense, and the problem lies with the fact that you're not on good terms with your head's existing body. It might even be likely that it has the ability to take over dead bodies."

*Disgusting. And either way, all that was way over the top.*

"Indeed, normal people are incapable of doing such things. But—as long as a motive exists, humans have been known to all sorts of things. For example, someone's daughter might have died, and this person wanted to let their daughter's body live on for eternity—or maybe even, 'I accidentally killed someone, and I need to cover it up, so I might as well use it for some experimental research'."

In a way, all that had sounded much more dubious than human experimentation, but Shinra merely went on with his morbid analysis breezily. Celty didn't want to listen anymore, and hurriedly tapped the keyboard with her fingers.

*No matter what, I need to have a good talk with that 'head' before deciding anything. Everything else will have to wait—*

Before she finished typing, Shinra threw a forceful question at her:

"Do you intend to continue avoiding your own conclusion?"

Shinra's tone was exceedingly serious, and the atmosphere of light-heartedness just now was gone.

—I understand, I understand it perfectly well myself. Since things have come to this, I can only give up on

my head.

Steeped in the moment with such thoughts, Celty's fingers slowly began to move.

*Because I don't want to admit it. I don't want to admit—that all my efforts these past twenty years have been in vain.*

After reading this line with an aching heart, Shinra who had been talking with Celty while sitting in front of the computer in the living room, got up and walked into the neighbouring room. After entering, he sat beside Celty and directly faced the screen of her computer.

"How have they been in vain? The twenty years you've spent here haven't been in vain. Everything you've done in the past, as long as they can change the future for the better, then they've definitely not been in vain."

*Then tell me, what kind of changes for the better?*

"For example—you could marry me, and then you could take it as though those twenty years were fated arrangements for us!"

On hearing Shinra shamelessly saying such embarrassing things, Celty was unable to react for a moment.

If this had been an normal, everyday conversation, Celty would have immediately dismissed it as a joke, and wouldn't have taken it seriously at all—but she suddenly noticed that, Shinra had been unusually preoccupied with matters like this of late.

*Can I ask you something?*

"Of course."

Celty didn't really know how to ask a question like this directly at first, but eventually she toughened her resolve up, and briskly tapped the keyboard.

*Shinra, do you really like me that much?*

After reading that, Shinra hung his head.

"You still don't believe me?! Ah ah ah, 'when sorrow arrives, the eyes weep'. Such an expression is more than apt for this. I'm grieving over this, not because you don't believe everything I've done for you, but because you have been absolutely oblivious to my love for you!"

*But I don't have a head.*

"It's your personality that attracts me. Didn't a wise man say never to judge a person by the way they look?"

*But I'm not a person.*

—No matter how you put it, I'm not human. I'm only a monster who looks like a human. But after my memories disappeared with my head, I have no idea what I am, or my purpose for living, or why I have to exist.

Such perplexing emotions and feelings that could not be expressed...countless thoughts swirled around

within Celty's heart, and yet what appeared on the computer screen, was a few measly words.

*Aren't you afraid of me? How could you like something that's not human, a monster that doesn't comply with the laws of science that humans have defined? How come you can say things like this?*

The speed at which the lines of text were appearing increased. And as though in sync, Shinra's tone of voice had hardened as well, and was even slightly startling:

"We've already lived together for twenty years, and you still say these kinds of things...I don't mind at all in fact. As long as our hearts can connect—as our feelings are mutual, does anything else still matter? Of course, if you abhor me, then I don't have anything else to say...but I also don't believe that we can't do without each other...it's like a simple love-hate relationship right? So, you should trust me more."

Shinra seemed to have recovered, as evident from his vaunting. From the fact that he was still using some difficult words, it seemed that he hadn't really been overly perturbed about the whole thing.

*I trust you completely. The one I don't trust is actually myself.*

Celty thought she should take advantage of the fact that Shinra was still able to put up with all this, and thus resolutely poured out her problems.

*I don't believe in myself. If I were to love you, or even someone else—between us, would our views on love be the same? Yes, I think I do like you. But, I still don't know if the love I feel for you is the same as the love you humans feel.*

"Everyone experiences such dilemmas in their youth. And besides, even with two humans, their ideals might not necessarily be the same either. It's like my definition of 'liking' someone obviously isn't the same as Dazai Osamu's, although I think it would be better if this fact remained as it is...and no matter what, I'll venture to say that I like you, and you've already said that you like me, so there's absolutely no problem here."

Shinra seemed to be talking to her like a teacher does to his student, which made the headless rider's fingers stop completely.

"I said it before yesterday, I want to know the values a Dullahan has. But no matter what they are, it will never affect my feelings for you."

Shinra's expression told all, and his words were neither awkward nor abstract.

Celty's finger's stopped, and she silently listened to what he had said. After thinking for a while, she typed out the appropriate words.

*Give me some time to think about it properly.*

"Alright, I'll be waiting for your answer."

Shinra once again flashed a bright grin, and Celty decided to ask him a question that had been on her mind for a while:

*Even if you like me, I'm still not sure if I'm good enough for you. There are so many different kinds of women in this world, so why do you like someone without a head...someone like me who isn't human? Why?*

"Haha, have you ever heard of the saying: the worm wouldn't mind even if the knotweed is bitter?"

*No one says such things about themselves. Anyway, do you think I'm the worm or the knotweed?*

Although that was what Celty had typed, but a wave of uncomfortable heat swept across her heart. She believed that this was probably a sign that she had feelings for Shinra.

—Ah, I'm sure if I had a heart, I'd be able to hear it beating now.

Thoughts like this made Celty feel even more miserable. Since Shinra was human, there would always be some kind of untraversable distance between them.

Dullahans didn't have hearts. Shinra's father had told Celty right after dissecting her, that although her body was built similarly to humans, but all her organs were merely there and had no use whatsoever. She had blood vessels, but no blood flowed through them. And the interiors of her body were not blood-colored, but merely a stretch of the original color of muscles—like a model of the human anatomy. Her body could move by some unknown principle, and no one knew what it used to get energy to move. It was clearly just an empty shell, but wounds inflicted on her body healed unusually quickly.

As Celty thought of what had happened after the dissection, she remembered Shinra's father asking her: "How do you die?"

And ten years after that, one day, Shinra had told her:

"You're definitely a shadow. You are definitely the shadow of your head, or even your real identity which you left behind in another world—either way, you are a living shadow. And since you are a shadow, you don't need to consider anything about where you get your energy to live and move."

Logically speaking, shadows could not move on their own; but since she was an existence that was beyond logic, she decided to just stick to what Shinra had said and not think about it anymore.

Anyway, she should be focusing on taking care of her head more than anything else these days.

Only then—with whatever conclusions I reach, will I decide my reason for living.

Celty clenched her fists, and thought about the two students she had met today.

Both of their expressions had revealed their true feelings. The first student had faced Celty and Shizuo without a single hint of fear or hesitation, and had glared at them from start to end with steady and gleaming eyes. And the other one—he'd shown very apparent fear towards Celty, but even so, even when facing Celty, he had been 'grinning'. His expression then, was like he had seen the very demons and apparitions which he had feared so deeply in his heart appearing right before him.

When she thought of that, she once again withdrew her feelings.

—She told herself, that maybe all that was just her own opinion.

Although she could judge their emotions from their eyes and expression, but she didn't think she had the right to do so. Because she didn't have eyes that could communicate her thoughts, and she didn't have a face to smile or show anger or sadness. She didn't even have a brain like the humans did to control their emotions. She didn't know what she used to think, or what she used to feel. How could someone like her judge someone else's emotions?

An angry gaze or an aggrieved one. The connections humans had with each other—all that was merely knowledge to her when she first came here. From television, manga and movies and so on...the books in Shinra's house were all a little biased, but she could rely on actual contact with people or through the news to correct them. But, all that came from someone else's knowledge as well, and if she wanted to know if anything was factually accurate, perhaps she'd have to be human to know.

And it was precisely because of that, that caused that unease she'd just told Shinra about to take over her heart. Did she even have any feelings? That was what worried her the most.

In the past, she'd never thought about things like that. She had been entirely focused on finding her head, a task which left her too drained to think about anything else. It was only of late, after she had started surfing the Net, and had more opportunities to interact with 'people', that made her begin to seriously consider just how different or similar her own emotions and values were with those of humans.

When Shinra had first taught her how to use the computer, she'd been rather hesitant and suspicious towards it. Now, other than work and searching for her head, she spent almost all her time in front of the computer. Especially when she switched to the in-built DVD player and television and radio tuner mode, she could watch all the movies and dramas she wanted at once, and the time she spent at the computer had increased dramatically.

While surfing the Net, Celty had gradually began to interact with humans. She had absolutely no idea how the person on the other side of the screen looked like, nor did she know about his history or experiences. Yet, people still built up relationships over the Internet like this. Not knowing how the other party looked liked hardly mattered to someone like her who didn't even have a face. In normal society, the only few people who she interacted with were all introduced to her by Shinra. But as for those who knew her true identity—there was only Shinra and Shinra's father. Although there were an abundance of rumours about the headless rider, but hearing just those wasn't enough for one to know that Celty was female, let alone her identity as a Dullahan.

She didn't intend to conceal that fact, but she wasn't keen on openly declaring it either.

—Although Shinra said that, but I'd rather have the values of a human. If my personality now already is 'human', then I have to cling tightly to my humanity.

Celty was not human, and that was a fact that often troubled her.

If she were to find her head, or if she were to regain her memories, what kind of expression would she make, if she were to be a human in such a situation?

Even if she were to have the knowledge, she wouldn't be able to find the answer on her own.



第十章

【ダラーズ】

開幕

# Chapter 10: 'Dollars' Opening Scene

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Yagiri Pharmaceutical's research facility.

In the meeting room of the sixth facility, Seiji sat in a seat in the corner. His hands were balled up into fists and he was muttering incoherently to himself. His sister, Namie tenderly embraced her brother, comforting him.

“It’s going to be OK, I promise. We’ll definitely find her for you...so, put your mind at ease.”

After going through that beating from Shizuo, Seiji had been brought to the police station. As the victim hadn’t been present, and what with Seiji’s injuries, no one could really be sure who the real victim was. So he was released after a while, without being charged for anything at all.

—Sis was able to come so quickly to pick me up, so maybe she pulled some strings.

Seiji thought this, but then decided that even if it were so, there was nothing he could do about it anyway.

—I know about the twisted love Sis has for me. The love my sister has for me, is probably from her over-possessiveness. But it doesn’t matter who loves me. I’ll only take care of my own love, and I’ll only live for my love.

—In order for me to succeed in my love, I’m willing to use the love of anyone who loves me as a stepping stone—because if that person can sacrifice something for and dedicate themselves to the person they love, the person who loves me will be very happy indeed.

Namie who had been standing by her Seiji’s side, and seen through his way of thinking a long time ago. But it didn’t matter. Either way, as long as that ‘head’ was in her hands, Seiji would need her. The reason she was so jealous of the ‘head’, was probably this too. An ironic twist of fate, had caused Namie to smile in self-amusement.

Namie was seemingly oblivious to the fact that the subordinates were watching her. Those who were watching her pamper her brother like this, felt a shred of terror rise in their hearts.

While still rather traumatized by what they were seeing, one of them was ordered by Namie to go out.

“You don’t need to worry about a thing...leave it all to your sister.”

She finished, and his sister quietly left the meeting room.

“So, did you find him?”

“Yes. The person Seiji-san called Ryuugamine, lives in a run-down apartment near Ikebukuro Station.”

Namie listened to the subordinate’s report as she left the meeting room, along a narrow corridor a distance away from the meeting room. From the fact that the subordinate had even addressed Seiji as ‘Seiji-san’, it was apparent that the power the Yagiri family had over the company was terrifying indeed.

Namie seemed like a completely different person from how she was in the meeting room, and ordered the subordinates with the iciest expression possible on her face.

“Since you’ve already found her, hurry up and get those ‘subordinates’ to bring her back.”

“It’s in the middle of the day, we’ll attract a lot of attention there—”

“It doesn’t matter.”

Namie cut the subordinate off just like that, preventing him from expressing his concerns.

—If I wait until nightfall, my brother will definitely look up that Ryuugamine brat on his own.

Namie was more concerned for her brother’s safety than the unlikely risks that came with it. But, she wouldn’t show this side of her when her brother wasn’t around. She quickly instructed the subordinate:

“Listen well, contact all the ‘subordinates’ immediately. I don’t care who it is, nor do I care if they’re dead or alive. If the situation calls for it, just get them to take them out.”

The subordinate before her couldn’t find a sliver of mercy in her eyes, and broke out in cold sweat.



Proper lessons started in Raira Academy as of today. At least that was what was supposed to happen. Most of the first lesson was spent on going through what they were going to learn in the coming year, teacher introductions and things like simple syllabus reviews and so on. The only classes that had started proper lessons were in fact just arithmetic and world history.

The day had passed uneventfully. A supposedly memorable day had just gone by like that.

The only thing that had bothered Mikado today, was not only Harima Mika’s absence, but also the fact that the welfare head Yagiri Seiji was similarly absent. After hearing about their relationship yesterday from Anri, Mikado had been feeling rather uneasy. He wondered if their twin absences had anything to do with each other.

Not only that, the girl who had lost her memory and was sitting alone at home was another source of worry for him as well.

Her memory had not returned even when morning came, and she’d refused to go to a hospital or a police station. She had seemed especially frightened when he mentioned a hospital.

“That...I’m fine! I’ll just wait here patiently for you to get back!”

As she assured him of that fact, she seemed a lot calmer than she had been yesterday, and didn’t look like someone who had lost their memory, with that kind of relative mental stability.

On seeing that her condition had taken a turn for the better, Mikado had gone to school with a peace of mind. But as to what he should do next, he was absolutely at a loss. If he still couldn’t ascertain her identity in the next few days, he’d probably have to take her to a police station. He’d thought about letting her stay in Masaomi’s house, but then again, his family members were staying with him there.

Mikado had been thinking about the best thing to do the whole time. And as he thought and thought, school had ended before he knew it.

The class representatives meeting ended without a hitch, and as Mikado and Anri were walked out of the school together, he decided to ask her about Harima Mika.

“Did she contact you after that?”

They didn't really have anything else to talk about, which was pretty awkward, so Mikado decided to ask her something about Mika's situation.

"Actually, I haven't heard from her since yesterday afternoon..."

"I see..."

Looks like it backfired. If that's so, the relationship between the missing Mika and Seiji who's absent today is even more suspicious. Could it be that Seiji and Mika decided to commit suicide together or something? Although that was what Mikado was worried about, he definitely couldn't voice it out to Anri.

It was at times like this that he wished Masaomi was here—but he'd heard that the disciplinary committee meeting would be taking some time.

Apparently, Masaomi had started a passionate debate with the other head of discipline in class, and no one had bothered to stop him.

So, he'd just decided to go home first. Mikado had meant to part ways with Anri after they'd reached the school gate, but just when they were about to step out of the grand Western-styled gates, someone shouted suddenly:

"Ah! Takashi! It's him!"

A girl was standing outside the gate, pointing at Mikado and Anri.

She looked like the girl whose cellphone had been trampled on Izaya, and had even brought a muscular guy with her this time.

A strange foreboding permeated Mikado's entire body. At the exact same moment, a muscular guy seized him by the collar and pulled him up.

"Brat, so you're friends with the bastard who crushed my girlfriend's cellphone right?"

"I wouldn't say friends..."

—For something like this, you should look for the police, not your boyfriend.

Mikado wanted to tell that to Bully Girl A, but his neck was being restrained, so it was hard to talk.

"Spit it out! Where's that bastard you were with yesterday?"

Straight to the point. The muscular man hadn't let Mikado say a thing, and just wanted to know about Izaya.

Myseriously appearing. A black bike had soundlessly appeared behind the man.

As fast as lightning. The human-like 'shadow' mounted atop the bike, had knocked Takashi down from behind.

Survival of the fittest. Orihara Izaya had appeared from nowhere, had leapt up—and landed squarely on the muscular man's back.

Mercilessly. Izaya who was standing on the man's back, hopped up and down repeatedly.

In the blink of an eye. All that—in the short span of ten seconds, had appeared before Mikado's eyes.

“Thank you...”

Before the dumbfounded Anri and the other girl, as well as the other passing students, Izaya bowed respectfully. Takashi who was still lying under his feet, had probably passed out.

“You knew I had no interest in hitting girls, so you brought your boyfriend here instead! What an admirable girl. I’d make you my girlfriend, but sorry, you’re not my type, so just go home!”

Izaya’s words were rather hurtful, but the girl had already run off before Izaya had finished, completely forgetting about Takashi who was still sprawled under Izaya’s feet. Even Mikado who had never met him before felt a little sorry.

Izaya immediately forgot about the girl who had run off, and started to talking to the dumbfounded Mikado:

“Sigh, it was such a pity yesterday. Someone interrupted us, so I couldn’t talk to you properly. Shizu-chan probably won’t come here, so it’s good. At first, I wanted to find out where you lived and just visit you directly, but then I thought it would seem a little intrusive, so I decided to hide behind the school gate and wait for you!”

Izaya was grinning at Mikado, but Mikado didn’t know the point of his smile, nor his reason for looking him up.

No, more accurately, there was in fact one reason for this person to look him up. But Mikado wasn’t willing to admit it, and merely tightened his fists.

It was unclear if Izaya had sensed Mikado’s feelings, and he cocked his head quizzically:

“Which reminds me, why is the black bike here?”

—I should be asking you that.

That was Celty’s inward response to Izaya’s question.

The student before her was most definitely the one who had run off with her ‘head’. Celty had merely found out that someone was going to beat him up, and had rushed over to help, and had no idea why Izaya had suddenly showed up.

Izaya probably shouldn’t have any ties to a normal youth who was still in high school.

Could this kid be the son of politician? Or maybe, he was someone who specialised in selling drugs to middle school and elementary school students—an über baddie who promoted doing drugs throughout the school?

But, no matter what kind of person this boy was, Celty had no intention of finding out now.

To her, the most important thing, was whether he knew where her ‘head’ was.

Looking at Anri who seemed even more bewildered than himself, Mikado hurriedly came back to his senses:

“See...see you Sonohara-san, I have to go now!”

“Eh...oh, OK, see you.”

After saying their hasty goodbyes, Mikado hurriedly left the scene. Not sensing anything amiss, the ‘shadow’

and the ‘bad person’ followed behind. When they were a distance away from the school, Mikado turned back nervously, and suggested to Izaya, who was sure to know what he meant:

“About...that...although I’m not sure what’s going on...either way, let’s go to my house before—”

In the middle of his speech, Mikado took a deep breath. If he brought them to his house, wouldn’t the girl see the black biker? But then again, the black biker had probably looked him up because of her anyway.

“And...that...um...I’d like to ask the black biker something...”

After hearing that, Celty retrieved a PDA from the pocket of the biker suit made of ‘shadow’, tapped the keyboard and the words ‘What is it?’ appeared on the screen.

It looked like he understood human language. Mikado heaved a small sigh of relief, and realized the strangeness of the situation he was facing.

—Ah, I kind of feel like crying now.



The unthinkably old building, just a short distance from the train station, was covered in fine cracks and snaked in ivy.

As they neared the old apartment, Mikado’s footsteps slowed:

“Um, we’re here, I live on the first floor...so can you please tell me what’s going on? Just who are you people?”

Celty didn’t mention anything about her ‘head’ or her true identity, and randomly came up with the reason: “I was looking for a lost friend, but she ran away when I found her for some reason.”

But Mikado wasn’t foolish enough to believe such hastily made-up excuses. Thus, as she didn’t have a choice anymore, Celty decided to reveal her true identity to Mikado.

After asking Izaya to leave them alone for a while, Celty brought Mikado to the back of the apartment.

Then, Celty made up her mind, and began typing on the PDA.

*How much do you know about me?*

As he looked at the small LCD display, Mikado thought for a bit and nervously began to state what he knew:

“...That...you’re an urban legend—and you ride on a motorbike that doesn’t make a sound or has headlights, and...”

Mikado hesitated here, and after a deep intake of breath, he said in a voice that was both fearful yet tinged with anticipation:

“—and that...you don’t have a head.”

After listening to Mikado’s answer, Celty went on typing.

*Do you believe that?*

Just after showing that to Mikado, Celty began to curse herself for her stupidity. Just who would believe something like that? And just as she thought that, Mikado who was standing in front of her, nodded lightly.

—Eh?

In the wake of Celty's surprise, Mikado said to her softly:

“Um...could you let me see inside your helmet—”

On hearing his rather blunt request, Celty stared intently at his face.

—Ah ah, it's the same expression as yesterday.

That strange expression that was both uneasy and tensed with anticipation, and mixed with despair and joy. The student before her had asked her to reveal herself with such an intriguing expression in his eyes. Celty considered his request for a bit, and typed the following line of words:

*Promise me you won't scream?*

Celty once again felt that she'd asked another stupid question, but she just wanted to make sure. These twenty years, aside from doing so in Shinra's presence, she had never taken off her helmet before. There had been a few times when her helmet had been knocked off in a scuffle, and the reactions of all who had seen it, had always been that of 'sheer terror'.

But the youth called Mikado in front of her was ready and willing to experience this terror. Not only had he believed Celty and not dismissed it as a lie or joke, he even wanted to see for himself. Asking someone like him to promise 'not to scream', was stupidity in itself.

As Celty thought about that, Mikado gave the response she had expected.

As she watched him nod vigorously, Celty slowly—pushed up the visor of her full-face visor.

Darkness. It was just a space of nothingness. Of course, logically, there'd still be air, but the presence of something like that was unimportant to Mikado. The thing that was supposed to be filling up that space was no there, and it was meaningless even if there was something else there.

—Ah ah, it's not there. It's really not there. This definitely isn't some trick. But even if it was, it'd be interesting to look into something like that.

A sliver of fear flashed in Mikado's eyes, but that fear did not result in him screaming, but instead caused shock to transform into pleasant surprise in his heart, and tears began to gather in his eyes.

“Thank you...thank you very much.”

Mikado didn't know how to express his thanks. Then, he looked up at Celty, very much like a child would.

As she looked at an expression like that, Celty was even more at a loss at what to do. In the past, there was practically no one who had been able to stomach the fact that she was 'headless', much less thank her for it. As for the situation she was facing today, she could hardly comprehend it—but it wasn't a bad feeling.

After that, Celty told everything about herself to Mikado, and Mikado readily accepted her request to see the 'head girl'.

Mikado also told her about how the girl had lost her memory. Celty found this a little strange, but either way, she had to see her, and pleaded for Mikado to help her clear up the misunderstanding.

The two of them called Izaya back. But he merely said one thing to them: "My business can wait", and continued standing in a corner, watching them.

"Alright...so, please wait for me here, I'll explain everything to her. I wouldn't want her to think I betrayed her if she suddenly sees you."

*Understood.*

As he watched Mikado and Celty, Izaya said in a teasing tone:

"This kid's pretty careful. Not bad."

The both of them decided to wait for Mikado to get back around the road beside the apartment. As they were waiting, Izaya said to Celty:

"Courier, it's my first time hearing your name. I didn't know you were a foreigner."

Izaya was smirking. From his expression, it was obvious that he had known all along. He'd said that because Celty had refused to tell him before, and thus wanted to make fun of her.

Celty knew that, and thus decided to ignore him. This guy probably even knew about her true identity. But then again, information from witness accounts, probably wouldn't suffice to tell him about her identity in detail.

And besides, normal people shouldn't even be able to guess that the black biker 'wasn't human'. But Izaya wasn't a normal person, so she couldn't let her guard down.

"Speaking of which, hasn't he been gone a little too long?"

It was true. More than five minutes had passed. Even if he hadn't managed to convince her, he should have come back first at least.

"I'll go check up on him."

As she stood before the eerily quiet apartment, Celty felt a twinge of ominous premonition.

The fact that there was a van from a cleaning company parked beside the apartment further added to her unease.

—Why would a run-down apartment like this need a cleaning crew? It couldn't be...

Celty's premonition had been right.

"Hurry up and tell us...we only want to ask, where's that girl who was hiding here?"

"There's a girl's hair on your blanket. It's a short strand, but it's obviously longer than yours."

The moment Mikado had gotten home, the two men were already inside waiting for him. Both of them wore work clothes, and from their looks they were obviously not good people. Before Mikado could make a sound, they'd pinned him to the ground, and interrogated Mikado in low voices.

They were here to find the 'head girl', but Mikado really didn't know where she'd gone. Perhaps she'd been captured by someone else, or had run away by herself—

"I...I don't know! Let...let me go!"

“Oi, you’ve seen our faces. We’d better get rid of you right here.”

Mikado felt like crying from fear on hearing that clichéd line the crook had spouted. When he’d seen that supernatural being before, he’d been filled with unmistakable joy, yet as he faced these two crooks who were clearly human just like him, there was only fear in his heart. What was wrong with him anyway?

Just as he was about to cry from his helplessness, one of them shouted:

“Someone’s coming!”

After shouting that, the two of them rushed outside. Then not long later, came the sound of car speeding away.

“I...I-I-I...I’m saved...”

Mikado held back tears that had stemmed from his terror, but then burst into tears anyway because of the immense feeling of relief that followed.

As Celty rushed to the front door, she’d hesitated whether to pursue that van or not, but Izaya had said it wasn’t necessary for her to so.

“Those people are from Yagiri Pharmaceuticals. I’ve seen that van before.”

As he watched the van drive away, the informant disclosed some information free of charge.

“Yagiri...Pharmaceuticals...?”

“Heh, it’s a puppet company that’s on the verge of going bust and being bought over.”

After making sure he wasn’t hearing things, Mikado widened his tear-filled eyes. Firstly it was because the company name was the same as a classmate of his—and secondly, because ‘he’d heard the company’s name from something else’.

The tears were withdrawn.

The missing head girl. A Dullahan. Yagiri. Pharmaceuticals. Missing. Harima Mika. Sonohara Anri’s story. Yagiri Seiji. Human trafficking. Dollars.

The connection between all the pieces had suddenly appeared in Mikado’s mind, and then suddenly disappeared, and finally became a pile of deductions.

In that silent room, Mikado swiftly turned on the computer.

As he waited for the computer to boot, he turned on his cellphone which had been switched off during class and promptly checked his messages.

Celty watched Mikado in shock, not knowing what he was doing. Beside her—Izaya’s eyes gleamed, like a hunter which had chanced upon a rare animal.

“Honestly, I half-assumed he was—”

Izaya was only in mid-sentence when Mikado’s computer finished booting and he’d immediately gone online, and was entering some kind of password at an extraordinary speed. After accessing some website, he gripped the mouse and moved it with some kind of rhythm.

After browsing it for a while, Mikado turned to face the two of them.

Celty was astounded. Because Mikado's eyes were no longer those of the youth who had been so amazed by his surroundings from before. He was like a hawk which had spotted its prey, and his expression was both unfathomable and forthright as he faced the two of them. Then he lowered his head.

The person before her and the cowardly student just now were like two different people, which made Celty a little confused.

"Please, the both of you, cooperate with me for the time being."

Mikado said in a firm voice that would make it hard for someone to decline his request:

"All the pieces are 'in my hand'."

Izaya, as if showing off a new toy or something, patted Celty's shoulder and said:

"—Bingo."

Celty who had no idea about what Izaya was saying, could only stare at the other two in confusion.

Although she wasn't sure what was going, she did know that she'd never seen Izaya this happy before.

But, the happiest amongst the three was in fact—Ryuugamine Mikado.

Mikado was rather still baby-faced, so now he looked very much like a child who had just received a toy, and his eyes were sparkling with joy. It was hard to imagine he'd previously nearly been crying out of fear with an expression like this. He looked like it was taking his all to suppress his unbounded joy.

—These past few days...since he'd come to Ikebukuro, he'd met with a lot of incomprehensible situations. And it was those situations had linked together to form something so complete right before his very eyes.

Mikado once again confirmed the pieces that he'd assembled in his head, and happily took a deep breath.

His boring everyday life. The never-changing scenery. His ordinary self.

He wanted to free himself of all that, so he had come to this place.

Now, he felt that, indeed, he had finally freed himself from all that.

Ryuugamine Mikado had noticed, that at this very moment, he had risen to the level of being some kind of 'main character'.

And he also realized that, an 'enemy' that was threatening his way of life and perhaps even his very existence had also appeared.

As Mikado was already brimming with such excitement, he didn't feel a shred of hesitation or fear even at the thought of eliminating this 'enemy' of his.

Then, he began to speak. He told everything about himself to Celty and Izaya—



In front of the underground sixth research laboratory of the Yagiri Pharmaceuticals research facility, a frigid

voice pierced the air:

“Not there...what do you mean?”

“That...when the two ‘underlings’ got to the place, the door seemed to have been forced open...and the girl wasn’t inside.”

“So you’re saying, someone else might have gotten to her first?”

“A shabby apartment like that, probably wouldn’t be broken into for anything else.”

After listening to her subordinate’s report, Namie couldn’t help but furrow her brow.

If it was that student who had taken her, he probably wouldn’t take the trouble of forcing open his own door. But then again, besides herself, who else was there who could conceivably want to take ‘her’ away?

“And the student who lives there?”

“That...we originally wanted to wait until that student came back to question him, and perhaps to see if we should bring him back...but it looked like there were some people with him.”

“You should have just brought them all back. How useless...”

Namie clicked her tongue in irritation. That was when her cellphone started to ring. From the caller ID, it was obvious that it was someone she didn’t know, but she was worried that it might be something important, so she pressed the ‘Answer’ button.

“Hello?”

“Is this Yagiri Namie-san?”

The caller sounded very young, like a boy still in junior high.

“Yes I am, and you are?”

“My name is Ryuugamine Mikado.”

“\_\_!”

Namie’s heart rate began to accelerate. He was the person who had escaped with ‘her’, and was also her brother’s classmate. She hadn’t expected him to call just when they were discussing him, and she was even more puzzled as to how he had managed to get her phone number.

Unaware of all the doubts swirling inside Namie, the boy on the phone calmly said:

“Um, actually, there’s a girl hiding here with us...”

After a short pause, the boy on the phone said something unbelievable.

There was not a hint of anxiety in that voice, and he spoke as if he were merely inviting Namie out for dinner.

“—Would you like to make a deal?”

The same day 11 pm Ikebukuro

Darkness had long swallowed Ikebukuro's 60-Storey Street, and besides places like bars and such, most of the shops were already closed, with their metal shutters down. Cars had already started driving down the normally pedestrian-filled roads, coalescing to form an atmosphere that was completely different from in the day.

A young man in a bartender's outfit was leaning against a lamp post, and grumbling to a large black man:

“What is life? What do people live for? Someone asked me this, and I beat him to an inch of his life. If it was from some high school girl posing as a poet or something it'd be OK, but it came from some guy who was clearly over twenty who wanted to join the underworld and then ran away because he didn't like doing menial jobs. That's clearly a crime right?”

“That's right!”

“No, everyone has the freedom to think about their life's purpose. I can't say anything to that. But, what could asking someone else about your own life possibly achieve? So, just as his pupils started getting bigger I told him: ‘That's your life, why don't you just live so you can die?’ But then again, he was the shopkeeper so I might have been a little too rash...”

“That's right!”

“...Say Simon, you're not listening to anything I say are you?”

“That's right!”

So Heiwajima Shizuo let out a roar of anger and flung the bicycle beside him over, which Simon caught with one hand.

Even something like that, could easily meld into the city scene.

Nighttime in Ikebukuro would be blanketed by an atmosphere that was totally unlike that of the daytime. The relatively disorganized surroundings were gradually swallowed by the darkness, and the world momentarily seemed to be turning backwards. Recently, many people were turning to spending the night at the cheaper manga cafes than hotels, so there were similarly more people who didn't bother taking the last train home.

On the street near the train station, there were employees of a karaoke lounge going around trying to pull customers in, and became even more insistent when they caught sight of groups of students or people in the workforce who were planning an initiation celebration for new members in their office. But most of these people had already decided where they wanted to go, and disappeared from the street group after group as such.

People who had just finished their drinking sessions on the way home were also traipsing down the streets, as well as youngsters who were planning to party all night and maybe groups of foreigners and such. Although it couldn't compare to during the day, there were indeed quite a few people traversing the streets at night.

And—

Standing before the Tokyu Hands departmental store, around the main road intersection, were two people who looked very out of place in the crowds.

One was a student wearing his school blazer, and the other was a woman in a business suit.

The woman in the business suit—Yagiri Namie, had come to the appointed destination, and asked the youth before her:

“So you’re Mikado-kun? You look a lot more…docile than I’d imagined. Or maybe, is that the sort of kid we have to look out for these days?”

It was an equable voice. And in that equability, one could feel an endless frigidity.

She wasn’t leaning against anything, and was merely standing erect in front of the large building. She seemed to be giving off an icy aura and looked relatively uptight, so those boys from the karaoke lounges and host clubs, and those who were just looking to pick up girls, kept their distance.

On the contrary, Mikado was wearing a Raira blazer, and the vibe he gave off was that of an ordinary teenager.

Obviously, those touts wouldn’t be bothering some school kid hanging around by himself. In fact, the chances of a policeman taking him back to the station because he’d seen him loitering around in his school uniform were in fact higher.

Two people who were so atypically different, yet they were both similarly out of place. A silent sort of tension had started to emerge and materialize between them.

“So—what’s this deal you were talking about?”

He’d gotten her to come all the way here. He should at the very least know most of what was going on. After all ‘she’ had probably told him everything yesterday night.

“Simple. Um, I mentioned it when I called you…the person you’re looking for is with me right now.”

Even as she heard what Mikado said, Namie kept her composure—he wants to cut me a deal, even though he already knows everything. He’s just a kid in the end, a silly, bratty kid.

He wants to carry out this deal right here in the 60-Storey Street. He probably thinks that by getting us to come to a crowded place like this, we won’t dare to do anything to him.

But obviously Namie wouldn’t come alone. In order for her subordinates to blend in with the crowds, she brought a group of personnel dressed as working class individuals—they were the security personnel of the company, and had originally been in charge of security of the research labs. They were armed with stun guns and there were about ten of them. They were all controlled totally by the company and couldn’t be more loyal. Furthermore, as an added precaution, other ‘subordinates’ and hired thugs were stationed in alleys and even among other cars in 60-Storey Street, numbering to around twenty.

And she wouldn’t lower her guard even though he was just a kid. Since he’d dared to call her here to cut her a deal, it probably meant he’d brought some guys with him. And since she knew he’d be bringing people along, naturally she’d want to be thoroughly prepared.

Seeing that he’d had the guts to actually show up, Namie decided that it would be alright if he just wanted money or something, so she’d accepted.

She’d thought, the moment she got ‘her’ back, it wouldn’t matter what that brat did—she’d have the means to deal with him.

“So, how much do you want?”

Namie's question had been very simple. There was no reason to do anything extreme in a silly little deal like this. Should she inadvertently reveal anything, and it got recorded, she'd be in deep trouble.

That was what she thought at first—

“No, I don't want money.”

“? Then how do you want to make this deal?”

“Don't you understand? What I want is the truth.”

—What is he saying?

When he realised that Namie in fact did not understand what he was driving at, Mikado slowly told her his final demands:

“Please admit the wrongs your brother—Yagiri Seiji did.”

“—!”

The surrounding atmosphere momentarily changed from that of the warm mid-spring to one which would be found in a freezing winter. After a brief silence, Namie glared at him with a gaze that could freeze whoever it was directed at, and spoke in a supremely intimidating voice:

“You...what did you just say?”

“I want you to admit what your brother did to Harima Mika, as well as the things you did to her body. Unfortunately, what I have is only circumstantial evidence, so to put it bluntly—I want you to turn yourself in.”

Mikado said all that calmly and composedly, yet sweat was pouring down his hands like a waterfall. For a moment, his opponent looked even more murderous than before. He feared that relaxed just a little, he might just burst out crying.

“Um, I'm sure turning yourself in will result in the least possible losses for your company.”

“So that's what it was...your objective was never fiscal. Your goal...was to bring down our research facility...”

“This is all to free the ‘head’ girl...and you even broke into my house, and in order to ensure my own safety, I have no choice but to do this. I think, if you were to willingly turn yourself in now, I'm sure, chances are, that your company will still be fine.”

As Mikado explained the situation with an indifferent face, he realized that there was something strange happening with Namie:

‘Ah...too bad...what happens to the company is none of my concern.’

Namie's expression—one which he could not discern if she was crying or laughing, penetrated his pupils.

Mikado tried his best to bear with such a sight, and patiently waited for her to continue. He was like a prisoner awaiting for death sentence with a heavy heart and all his hairs standing on end.

Although Namie was no longer as calm as before, she spoke in an unusually cool fashion:

“I don’t care if you want to bring our company down, or even completely destroy it...but, you shouldn’t have done this...anyone who gets in my brother’s way is not fit to live in this world.”

Namie’s response was extremely simple. On hearing it, Mikado closed his eyes as if he’d just realized something.

—I see, so that’s the kind of person she is. No wonder...she’s doing all these things that have no benefit to the company at all.

As the woman’s hand began to move, Mikado did the same thing too. His hand dived into his pocket and, and brushed against the ‘Send’ button of his cellphone.

—All for a reason like that...

Mikado had nearly been overwhelmed by Namie’s unusually passionate devotion to her brother, but he’d managed to get back on his feet, and launch a counter-attack.

—She caused someone’s death and gave that corpse a ‘personality’ for selfish reasons—and now she even wants to kill me. Ah, so this is what was getting on my nerves the most. I see, so the person I care about most is myself. For myself, I’ll do anything. It’s because I’m like that, that I absolutely can’t stand people like her who use other people as an excuse to do things for themselves! Especially when they use a reason like that to screw up people’s lives, I simply can’t stand it—!

Anger slowly rose in the youth’s heart. He was still longing for an unconventional life, but if it was this outrageous, then it was a different story.

Then, he said some provocative things to Namie:

“...Aren’t you going too far? For a reason like that, for your own happiness, you caused Yagiri-san to lose his happiness.”

“...You’re at your wit’s end, what else do you have to say? You’re already this age, you do this kind of thing, but you only can say clichéd things like that? If you’re only at this level, then just shut up and don’t screw with me!”

Namie took a step towards Mikado, and shouted that at him as if she was cursing him.

But Mikado would not be defeated:

“Yeah, I only know how to say things like that. But so what? You killed someone so you should repent. How can someone who doesn’t even understand such a simple concept lecture me on this?”

As if he was trying to force Namie back, he too took a step forward.

“You watch too many dramas, and they’re probably all those ones for old people with forced happy endings! What do you take this...this city for? This is reality! This isn’t TV or in the magazines, and you’re no hero. Know your place!”

Both of them took a step towards each other. Namie’s voice was quivering with frigid anger, but Mikado showed no sign of retreating.

He was always with Kida Masaomi, and whatever he said could hardly be understood. Even though the topic was different, but it was definitely easier for him to rebut Namie’s arguments.

“So what if I love beautiful things like that. I want a happy ending and I absolutely adore clichéd and stereotypical developments. What’s wrong with that?...So what’s wrong with trying to achieve an ending

like that in reality? I won't say it's for someone else, because in the end it'll always be for myself. That's why I do it! Yes, this way of thinking is really old-school, but since it's old-school, doesn't it just mean that that's what everyone thinks?"

The argument effortlessly spilled out of Mikado's mouth, even things that he didn't believe in with had simply gushed out.

He wasn't deliberately provoking her because he had low-self esteem or something, but only because he wanted her to focus her attention on him, until 'the time was ripe'.

Noticing that it was nearly time, the finger which Mikado had placed on the cellphone button began to move.

—There'll be no turning back after I press this button. I'm stepping into territory I should never be treading in. I wanted to avoid this at all costs. But from how the opponent is acting, it can't be helped.

—I don't have the ability nor knowledge needed to face off an opponent like her who doesn't listen to reason. And I don't have the time to try either, so I can only think of something right here and now to overcome this problem.

Mikado toughened his resolve, took a deep breath, and pressed the 'Send' button just as he exhaled.

—So I'll—'rely on numbers'!

"It's time to end this pathetic argument."

After a short while, Namie slowly raised her hand.

"It doesn't matter if you've brought people with you, or even if you're going to use truth serum—"

And as she raised her hand to the highest point, a steady smile materialized on her face.

I can eliminate my brother's enemies—ah, I didn't expect it to satisfy me so easily.

On Namie's signal, her subordinates began to act—

"Oi, it's time to move out. We're just gonna kidnap a brat huh."

"Wait...hold on. If that brat's got some cops with him, we're dead meat..."

"This is no time to worry about something like that. The director doesn't care about anything anymore, even the police. We'll just do it, and if anything crops up we'll just push all the blame to that woman."

The man pushed his hesitating partner aside, and removed his drunkard guise, and once again examined his surroundings. Then—

"Huh...?"

When he realised that, he asked his hesitant partner.

"It's...already around 11 p.m. isn't it?"

"Yeah."

After confirming the time, he felt an inexplicable chill.

“...The people here around here, don’t you think...they’re more of them now?”

The first hitman jumped out of the crowd and just as he made towards Mikado, walking as naturally as possible—

Beep beep beep! Beep beep beep!

It was the message alert of a cellphone.

The hitman had at first thought that it was from his cellphone, but then he realized he wasn’t even carrying one with him. The sound he’d heard had been from someone else’s cellphone a distance away.

He glanced in the direction of the sound. The sight that entered his eyes, was that of a black man standing at over two metres tall—Simon.

It was the ‘giant’ that was relatively famous around this street. The hitman averted his gaze and carried on walking forth, not daring to look back.

Just then—right after that message tone, another melody rang out.

The hitman turned in the direction of that melody. He caught sight of a bartender wearing sunglasses—Heiwajima Shizuo.

Why would the one known as Ikebukuro’s fighting machine appear here?

As he turned his head once more, looking in the other directions, he saw even more different kinds of people, and all of them were reading their mail.

“...?!”

Then ‘they’ realized, that even before some of the ringtones had finished playing, another wave of melodies would start ringing out, forming a twisted harmony.

Beep beep beep beep! Beep beep beep beep!

The incoming message alert tones rang once again, but this time, the sounds were coming from literally every direction.

“?!”

It was then when Namie and the hitmen realized something strange was going on.

The initially sparse crowds had, for some reason had suddenly turned into ‘masses’. People who had their cellphones on ‘Silent’ mode fished their phones out from their pockets on realizing that they were vibrating. The numbers of those whose phones were ringing and emitting melodies far exceeded those whose phones were quiet.

And then—

It was already too late when they realized it. They—had been completely engulfed by the waves of the ringtones.

Sound, sound, sound. Melody, music. Chords from electronica, music, formed a harmony. Sound Sound Sound Sound Sound, Melody Melody Melody, Electronica Electronica Electronica, Chord Chord, Sound Sound, Harmony Harmony Harmony, Sound Sound Sound Sound Sound, Melody Sound Melody Sound Melody Electronica Sound Electronica Sound Harmony Harmony, Chord Harmony Sound Chord

Then, in the midst of the incoming message alert tones which were gradually beginning to quiet down—they were now engulfed by stares.

Stares. Countless stares from all directions.

Around them were dozens of people, maybe even hundreds. They were all facing them, merely staring at them—occasionally there was someone who would make small talk with the person beside them, but their stares were still mainly focused on them, as if they'd been separated from their surroundings and had been placed on a stage.

“What’s...happening...? They...just what are they aaaaarrrrggghhhhhh?”

In the face of something that she could never have expected would happen, something that completely defied everything she had ever known, Namie screamed in terror.

But the stares didn't stop even as she did, and the illusion that the whole world was against them slowly began invading their consciousness.

And Namie and her minions hadn't noticed at all, that the youth that had been making a deal with her, had just disappeared in the crowd, and disappeared into the stares—

The Dollars leader, had become a part of the crowd without a single person knowing.



♂♀

"Eh! How strange! Izaya and Shizuo are on the same street and they're not even fighting!"

Karisawa exclaimed in shock in a van parked by the roadside.

"Iyaya, it's probably because Shizuo hasn't noticed him. Iyayaya, but this is still really cool...it looks as if there are some junior high and high school students in there. But none of them are in uniforms..."

Among the vehicles parked along 60-Storey Street, there was Kadota and Yumasaki's van. In the van, there was Kadota and gang, and a girl who had just gotten on that morning, and she was eyeing her surroundings uneasily.

She was the girl Kadota and gang had decided to kidnap from the apartment near Ikebukuro Station before anyone else did.

After interrogating those hoodlums, they had gotten hold of the information that the mastermind of the situation had been one of the research facilities of Yagiri Pharmaceuticals. And just as they were making preparations to confront them directly, an encrypted message had been sent to cellphone of the leader of the hoodlums.

After forcing the guy to decode it, they realized the message contained an address, and mentioned 'a girl with scars on her neck', and a symbol of a door had been typed out at the back. The email message even came with a picture—it was a rather grotesque picture of a disembodied woman's head. From the condition of her skin, she looked very much alive, but the file name indicated that it was just a replica.

When Kadota asked the hoodlum what the picture of the 'door' meant, the answer he got was that it stood for DOA—dead or alive.

After that, Kadota and gang had first gone over to that apartment, forced open the door and saved the girl.

Perhaps it was because the thugs employed for the people snatching had parked their cars outside the Toshima ward, while Kadota and gang's vehicle was just in Ikebukuro, allowing them to get their first.

Although they didn't know who that trembling girl in the back of the van was, but Kadota as always, had filled in a 'report' form on the Dollars website. This form was to stop disputes between fellow Dollars members, but then again Dollars members practically never bumped into each other on the streets.

And if there did, it would probably be on friendly terms like with Karisawa and the illegal immigrant Kaztano; they had only found out today that they were in the same group as Simon and Shizuo.

They'd thought had first that illegal immigrants had Internet access and thus were able to join. Later they found out that they had been invited to join in real life by 'word of mouth'. The organization Dollars had seemingly crossed over from the Internet, and was using all sorts of methods to 'proliferate'.

—And the result of that proliferation, could be seen in today's 'first meeting'.

"Iyayaya, just how many people are there? That's right, isn't this more like a large scale offline BBS forum meeting than a gang meeting? Everyone looks pretty normal."

"That's because the Dollars itself isn't a colour gang at all! It's probably better to call it 'colourless'!"

"Oh yeah, I wonder what the leader's like."

"Who knows..."

Kadota who wasn't really able to share Yumasaki and Karisawa's excitement sat at the driver's seat and mumbled to himself:

"Ah...so this is the Dollars...not bad, not bad at all..."

This group I've joined, has exceeded all my expectations—Kadota proclaimed inwardly. At the same time, he was thoroughly taken in by the sight before him. Because the number of people congregating before him, had long exceeded that of most colour gang meetings.



At first glance, this group of people didn't at all seem like they had come for a meeting. They were all dressed differently in all sorts of clothes, and they didn't give off any particular vibe. Everyone stood where they liked, perhaps with people that gave off the similar airs as them.

Some of them were from the workforce, and some were high school girls in school uniforms, some were ordinary college students, some were foreigners, some who looked like they'd mingled with gangs, some were housewives, and some—and some—and some—;

A group like that had just gathered here. Although most of them were youngsters, but an onlooker would still be amazed at the sheer number of people who had congregated on the road.

Even if the police came, they'd be able to get away with it. It had been the aim of these people in forming a group, so they'd be able to blend seamlessly into the street.

Not long later, another similar message had been sent out.

Mikado had sent out a message just in time to everyone in his contacts—which was virtually everyone who had come, a message like that—

Anyone who isn't looking at their phones now is an enemy. You don't need to do anything, just stare silently.



Namie and her minions who stood unmoving, encircled by the collective stares, had completely snapped.

A lone Dullahan stood high above them, looking down at their state of perplexity.

In order to discern who was friend or foe.

Those who were surrounded by 'their' stares, still holding on to their weapons and were still banding together to protect Namie. Those were her—and the Dollars' enemies.

In exchange for backing them up, that evening, Celty had already met the girl who could be her 'head'.

The girl had a rather shocking stitch wound in a ring around her neck. When Celty had met her, she'd just asked her: What's your name?

Since she'd lost her memories, she probably wouldn't be able to answer—Celtiy had been hoping for something bad like that, but instead she got the worst possible response.

With empty eyes, the girl stared at Celty's helmet, and uttered the words:

“—Celtiy.”

—Case closed.

After hearing that, besides feeling a deep despair, she also felt a rush of relief as if her heart and mind had been totally liberated.

Watching Namie's entourage which completely stood out from the crowd, the black bike—Coiste Bodhar let out a loud caterwaul, as if flaunting her existence.

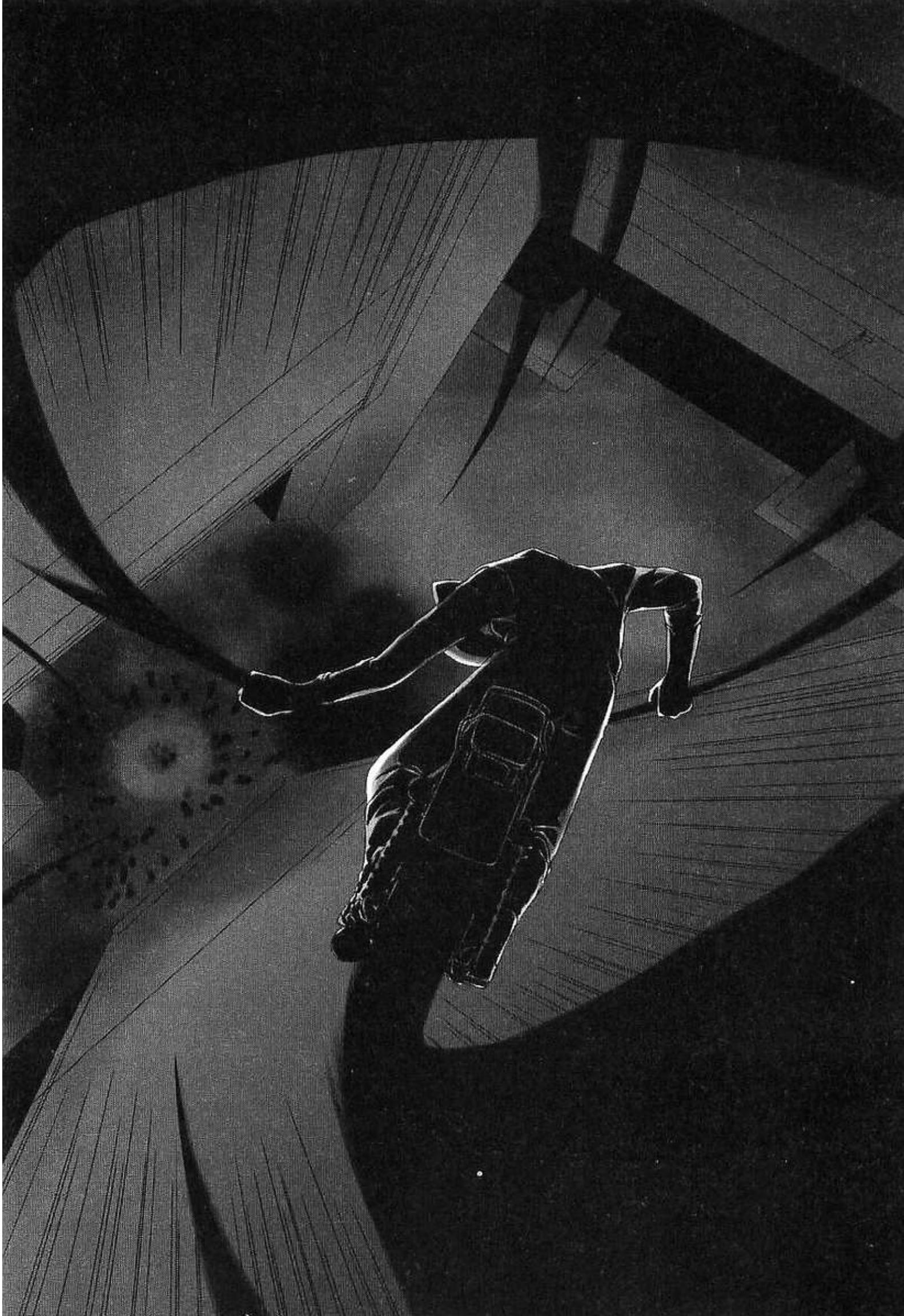
The masses which had been facing Namie and her minions, all looked up at where Celty was standing—the roof of a large high-rise building.

As if satisfied with the crowd's reaction, Celty spread out her arms.

From the roof of the building, down its face—she fell vertically downwards.

As the crowds on the ground began to scream, she expanded the 'shadow' surrounding her body as much as she could, and it looked as if a fog that was deeper than midnight had materialized in the darkness of the night.

Not long later, this 'shadow' engulfed the motorbike—snaking around the wheels and the building face, as if they were attracted to each other, allowing her to ride perpendicular to the wall.



The Dollars members and Namie's entourage who were congregated along 60-Storey Street—were witnessing something that defied all laws of physics.

Celty leaped from the wall, and descended in between Namie's entourage and the Dollars.

In the face of a scene that was like something out of a movie, there were people who were watching intently, people who were trembling in fear, and even some who had burst into tears.

Then—ignoring their stares, Celty pulled out a wreath of 'shadow' without hesitation from her back, and willed it into the form of an enormous scythe.

One of Namie's subordinates was quaking violently, and raised his specialized baton and brought it down towards her neck from behind her.

The helmet sitting on her neck had been knocked off, and revealed an empty space that was clearly missing something.

Screams of shock and terror momentarily rang out, and those standing at the back were alarmed as for some reason, the whole group in that instant had suddenly fallen into a state of sheer panic.

But—Celty showed no sign of stopping or hesitation.

Yes, I don't have a head. I'm a monster. I don't have a mouth with which to speak, nor do I have eyes to communicate my passion with.

But so what if I don't?

What's wrong with that?

I'm right here. I definitely exist here. And those who don't believe it should open their eyes wider, and watch my actions. Empty your ears, and listen to the screams of frustration of a monster.

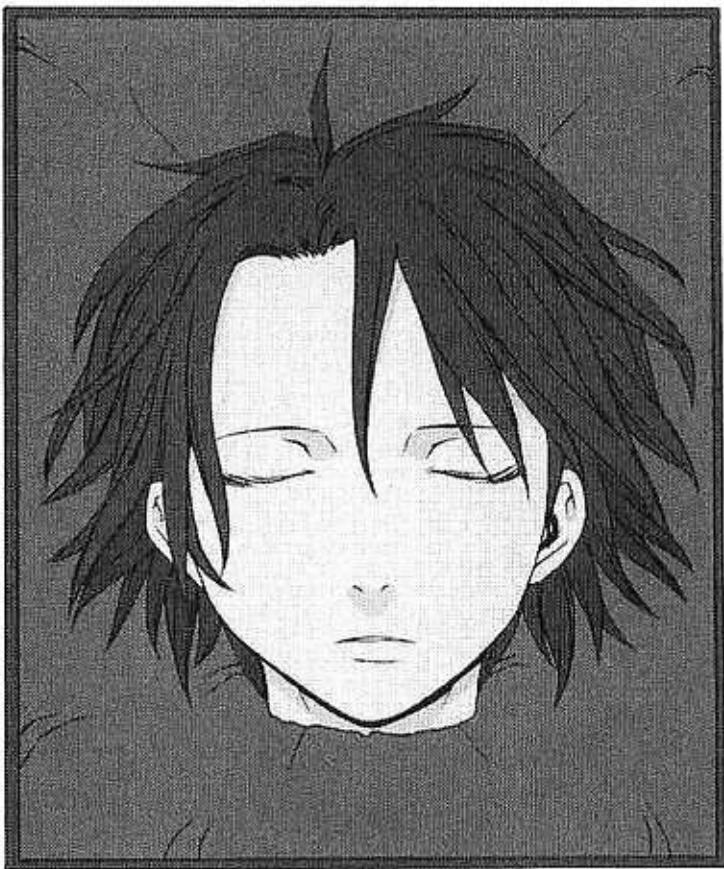
I'm here. Look, I'm right here.

Listen, I'm crying out now.

I've been born right here and now, in order to etch my existence into this place—

So, they 'heard'. The sight before them had transformed into a passionate scream inside their heads.

The screams of the Dullahan which had been impossible to hear, stained the street in the colours of a battlefield.



終章

閉幕

『ダラーズ』

last  
chapter

# Last Chapter: 'Dollars' Closing Scene

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The "Dollars" had originally been nothing more than a joke.

It had been Mikado's idea, and a few people he'd met online had felt it was a pretty good idea and had thus agreed to help him out with it.

They made up things about a group which was based in Ikebukuro, and spread its name all over the next. And later, they made up even more things on top of that, and whenever anything happened, they'd spread rumours about how they were the doing of the "Dollars". They never claimed to be from the "Dollars", and would always say that they had heard it from someone else. And if anyone wanted to know their source, they'd just ignore them, and they had even made a fake site to fool people.

And when the rumours began getting out of hand, Mikado and friends decided that since they'd started it, they might as well just go with it to the end and started a Dollars website. The website required a password to enter, and even prepared many 'member posts'. Then they began spreading the website's address. If anyone wanted the password, they'd pretend and say 'someone I know who's a member secretly told me', and then email it to them.

And just like that, they'd made up an organization. As for their objective, all they'd written on the homepage had been "All are welcome." There was absolutely nothing about 'rules and restrictions' on it.

Of course, at first there were many people who said things like "There's no such group in Ikebukuro." But strangely enough, gradually there were people who began saying things like "Someone's pretty confused, ha!" or "Why is some brat who hasn't even been to Ikebukuro talking?" The original creators all said they hadn't done it. Which was to say, people who weren't the creators were starting to defend the Dollars.

At first, they'd all been pretty enthusiastic about a situation like that, but then they slowly realized that there was something amiss.

Indeed, it had been just a joke at first. They had intended to stir up some excitement at first, and then later just ignore it later. They'd just wanted to play a little prank—but then things started moving in a strange direction.

At first it was just a made-up organization, and before they knew it, it seemed to having some kind of impact in real life.

They had no idea whose doing it was. But apparently, someone had jumped out from the online world into real life, and was spreading things by word of mouth in reality and getting all kinds of people to join the "Dollars".

The joke was going too far, and was leaving their extent of control. Things had come to this, so they could just 'fess up. Thus, Mikado and his friends just slowly disappeared from it all. They believed that just leaving Dollars alone, just letting it vanish by itself was the best way.

And yet, Mikado was the only one who was desperately clinging onto this 'joke'.

Today the group was indeed possessing real power. And Mikado felt that, should there be no one to keep these people in check, it would definitely be too dangerous. Deep down, there was certainly a misguided

sense of superiority he'd gained from that power. But he kept feelings like hidden in his heart. And when he finally realized it, he'd become the leader of the "Dollars".

No one had seen the one at the top of the Dollars before. And as absolutely no one had any idea that he was only a junior high student at that time, the group rapidly expanded.

Until tonight—a group that had been borne of fiction, had been embodied definitely in reality.

"This is really amazing—"

Izaya said that slowly, as he watched the situation that had passed its climax.

Celty had beaten up ten men in under three minutes, and then gone off in pursuit Namie who had fled in some unknown direction.

And the crowd that had congregated seemed to have woken up from an illusion, and broke into groups and went on their separate ways home. The meeting before had been like a dream, and on waking, the crowd had completely disappeared.

Those that remained, were merely a few cars parked at the roadside—and the regular night scene and crowd.

"Just now...were there really that many people?"

Kadota came out from a van parked at the roadside, and asked that to Orihara Izaya, whom he hadn't seen in a long time.

"Oh, long time no see Dotachin. Ah, in the twenty three wards in Tokyo, there are an astounding number of people, yet there's an equally astounding lack of land. It's easily the most densely populated place in the world. People can appear wherever they want, and it's not surprising if they disappear wherever either."

As the two of them finished their conversation, Celty had already returned to the entrance of the large road.

"And, Izaya...just what the hell was that? I've seen it before but...it's probably not human right?"

"You saw it yourself just now didn't you? She's a monster—be sure to talk to her with respect."

After telling that to Kadota in a joking tone, Izaya made his way towards Celty.

"Looks like you lost them."

Even though he'd just seen how Celty had looked in combat, Izaya continued to speak to her as he normally did.

Letting Namie escape had perplexed her quite a bit, and Celty leaned exhaustedly against her motorbike.

"Maybe, you've finally decided to give up?"

Izaya was as relaxed as ever, as he spoke to Celty who had the cross-section of her neck completely exposed.

—Despicable. This bastard knew I didn't have a head all along.

Even in the face of Celty's true form, Izaya still maintained his composure. On the contrary, Yumasaki and the others' excitement hadn't quite died down yet, and they were still shouting things like: "Hyaya, eh? How strange! It's real right? So, I'm not seeing things? Don't tell me she's...CG?!" The pair standing a distance away, were enthusiastically watching them.

Celty felt a little irritated as people looked at her like this, so she picked up her helmet which had fallen near her.

"Hey~ You know ghosts are only scary because they creep around unseen at first and then suddenly jump out to scare people: but you made such a flashy entrance...I think people here probably won't be afraid of you anymore."

After teasing Celty like that, he immediately brought up something he'd found strange:

"Which reminds me, you didn't kill a single person in the end right? Was something wrong with your scythe? Too blunt?"

Celty completely ignored Izaya's question, and merely patted away the dust on her helmet quietly.

The scythe she'd used today was different from the one she normally used, as she'd added a sheath on both sides of the blade. It wasn't so much a sheath, as it felt more like she'd just made both sides of the blade become the back of a blade.

—I still want to continue living in this place, so I don't want my reputation to fall too much.

She would never tell anyone that it was because of a childish reason like that. So she merely shrugged sheepishly and once again placed her helmet back where her head should be.

♂♀

Before he left, Izaya walked up to Mikado's side.

"Honestly speaking, I'm pretty shocked."

Izaya said that with a face full of joy, and not a single drop of sweat ran down his face. Speaking of which, during that meeting just now, just where had he been? Mikado was completely clueless about that.

Oblivious to Mikado's doubts, Izaya began candidly praising him:

"I knew all along that there were many people calling themselves the 'Dollars' online, but I never expected that the moment an offline meeting was mentioned...no, a gathering. It was such a last-minute suggestion, yet so many people still rushed over and turned up for it. Ah, humans have really exceeded my expectations."

After saying that, he shook his head lightly.

"But, Mikado-kun...you came here just because you dreamed of escaping a mundane everyday life didn't you? But just give it over a year or so, and life in Tokyo will become ordinary for you too. If you want to continue pursuing an extraordinary life, then I suggest you look elsewhere. Perhaps you could do things like

drugs and prostitution, and delve deeper into the underworld.”

Only when Izaya had mentioned that, did Mikado realise something. Just what should he do if that excitement he’d just experienced kept repeating itself, or if he truly became the head of the Dollars? Once his current life failed to satisfy him, would he be able to continue pursuing a new way of life for the rest of his life?

As if he’d read his mind, Izaya quietly smiled:

“To someone who’s a member of the underworld, things like that are completely normal to them. Once you step into it, it’ll become ‘normal’ to you in three days. Is someone like you really able to put up with a situation like that?”

Mikado had a deep empathy of what Izaya was driving at. But, this person—why was he telling this to him? Mikado couldn’t help but think Izaya probably had some kind of agenda, but since he had no idea of what this agenda was, he couldn’t say anything just yet.

“If you really want to leave normality—you have no choice but to keep evolving. It doesn’t matter if you want to rise higher or if you want to sink lower, it’ll be the same.”

Finally, he patted Mikado on the shoulder:

“Savour your normal life while you can. But, out of respect—I won’t charge you anything for Yagiri Namie’s number; and the fact that you’re the creator of the Dollars, I won’t sell anyone that info either. This is your group, use it however you want.”

After saying that, Izaya walked toward Celty without a word.

Mikado still felt rather uneasy, but he still bowed to Izaya’s retreating back.

Then, Izaya suddenly stopped in his tracks and turned his head, as if he’d suddenly remembered something and said:

“Actually I’ve been watching you online the whole time...ah~I’ve wanted to know all along just what kind of person started that amazing group called the Dollars. Alright, good luck then, Tanaka Taro-kun!”

“?!”

How had he known that name?—it was the username he used on that chatroom. Speaking of which, he’d also called Kadota “Dotachin”.

Then, he thought of what Izaya had just said. He knew he was the creator of the Dollars, and had been observing him the whole time—following him online.

Then, Mikado thought of one person. The person who had invited him to join that chatroom. The person who knew so much about Ikebukuro and the Dollars.

—No way—no way—no way?!



After that, the police officers who had been patrolling the area arrived in 60-Storey Street. At that time,

Mikado who had been wearing his school blazer and Celty, had hidden in the shadows of a dark alley until they left. Should the officers have seen a person in a school uniform at that time, he'd definitely be hauled off for some counseling.

People on the streets who had nothing to do with the Dollars, as well as the touts for the karaoke lounges and bars should have witnessed the disturbance that had occurred just a while before. But none of them reported anything to the police. An old saying goes: 'don't trouble trouble until trouble troubles you'. Likewise, no one really wanted to have anything to do with such a bizarre occurrence, and there were even people who thought it was just an illusion or something.

But—for some reason, after the police left, the youth's heart remained uneasy.

It felt like he'd forgotten about something—and just as Mikado was thinking about this, Celty who had put on her helmet once again was already making for the van that her 'head' was in.

Celty no longer held any feelings for her head, and the reason she was walking towards the van was because she had merely wanted to say one final goodbye to it. Then—

Stab.

She had just opened the van door when she felt an unfamiliar impact upon her back. And she felt the same thing once more a little above that area.

—That's strange. Didn't something like this happen to Shizuo yesterday too...?

That impact immediately turned into pain, which caused Celty to collapse onto her knees there and then.

She turned to look behind her, and she saw a tall youth in a school blazer standing there.

He held a large scalpel in his hand, probably taken from the research facility.

After a short period of silence, Celty's wound began to heal, and the pain slowly diminished. On seeing that, the youth said:

"To think a knife wound like that couldn't kill you..."

After making sure that the knife blade wasn't stained with blood, Yagiri Seiji calmly strode into the van.

—Hey hey hey.

Celty had absolutely no idea how to react to this unexpected visitor, and had almost forgotten that she'd been stabbed twice in the back. She thought back to what Mikado had said, and she supposed that this was the probably the boy called Yagiri Seiji who was pursuing her head—and was the younger brother of the woman just now. Like when he had been facing off with Shizuo, the way he stabbed people was just too normal, and thus it was hard to notice his actions. He was a guy like that.

Then, Yagiri Seiji stepped into the van and took the heroine away just like that.

"Eh...?"

Mikado who was watching from afar was unable to discern what was going on, and his mouth hung open.

He'd seen a teenager in a school blazer climb into the van, and not long after, he'd taken a girl with scars on her neck away.

Seiji took the girl's hand, and displayed a positively ecstatic smile. His gaze as steady as ever, he walked away from the van.

Karisawa and Celty who was watching beside her did nothing to stop him, or perhaps it was probably because they couldn't stop him.

It was because the way Seiji had acted in the van had been just too innocent and so full of dignity.

When she saw him, Karisawa had thought he was Mikado's friend. He was wearing the same school uniform, and there was not a trace of guilt or apprehension in his eyes.

In the van—he'd gazed so honestly at the head girl, and reached out a hand.

"I'm here to get you. Here, let's go."

On hearing those words, perhaps Karisawa and Celty would still be able to stop him. But in the next second, events took a turn for the completely unexpected.

"...Alright."

They hadn't thought the head girl would answer that immediately, and take Seiji's hand like that without any hesitation.

As if he'd expected the head girl to give this response, Seiji nodded vigorously and helped her off the van.

All this seemed like something fated from their previous lives, and the street in the night, had seemed to become the path on which they would be reunited—

"Eh? What?"

On seeing an unnatural scenario like this, Mikado felt rather bewildered, but continued watching intently.

When Kadota and Yumasaki saw Seiji's uniform, they assumed that he was with Mikado, and thus didn't pay any special attention to him, and merely continued casually looking on. Izaya had probably sensed that something was amiss, yet he had no intention whatsoever of stopping it, and went on observing the turn of events with a happy smile.

Not long later, when Seiji who had started walking down the street with the head girl spotted Mikado, he approached him of his own accord.

"Hey."

Seiji's greeting was extremely ordinary, yet it seemed so hair-raisingly alien. Mikado was unable to respond to that.

Seiji did not seem to take notice of Mikado's reaction and went on talking:

"I should probably thank you and Sis. Without Sis, I wouldn't know where she was: and without you, Sis would probably keep her locked up in that cramped research lab."

After thanking him in such an insipid manner, Seiji made to blatantly move past Mikado. Mikado hurriedly threw out a hand in an attempt to block them, and managed to glance at the girl with Seiji. Then, she perplexedly looked away. From what Mikado saw, this reaction was because she was afraid of something.

So Mikado stared at Seiji, and asked about an important matter:

"I hope you'll be able to answer me...it's about the thing I told your sister to scare her just now..."

"You mean the stuff about how I killed someone? Yeah, it's probably true."

On hearing him say that, Mikado momentarily felt a slight chill run down his whole body just looking at the person before him.

And Seiji had maintained such a composed expression as he said it, and raised a scalpel in front of Mikado who was blocking him.

"So, get out of my way. Since the matter of me killing that stalker girl is now exposed, then I have to run away to another place with her before the police arrive."

Seiji's eyes were not crazed in the least, and were not at all consumed by cruelty.

"Even if you say that..."

"What do you know? I've been watching her since I was little. Since the beginning when she was trapped in that cramped glass jar, I've always wanted to set her free. I wanted her to be free in this wide world, and I would live beside her. I've always always always always always always always been only thinking about that."

His eyes were so ordinarily calm, though they could be said to be filled with some kind of conviction. Or perhaps, it was the reality he had chosen. But from what others saw, it was something both incomprehensible and terrifying.

"What are you doing?"

Something was wrong. Izaya, Kadota, Yumasaki and the others successively surrounded the two of them.

On seeing the group of aggressive-looking people, Seiji shook his head gently:

"You guys are really annoying. No one can stop the power of love."

Even in the face of a situation like this, he still said with a completely straight face. He twisted the scalpel raised in his hand, turned to Mikado and said firmly:

"Speaking of which, don't you feel you're pretty useless? Whether it was then or 'now', you'd always have a bunch of cronies who'd be helping you out...you never did anything yourself, like the lowest-ranked underling. You probably haven't been in love with someone before right?"

"Someone who doesn't know how much work it is to gather people, is not even at the level of an underling."

On hearing Mikado's ridiculing remark, Seiji merely smiled painfully, and immediately lowered the scalpel, pointing it at him.

And at that time, a black shadow rammed violently into Seiji's body from behind.

“—!”

The attack had come from Celty who had been waiting in the wings. With the handle of her scythe, she struck Seiji's left hand hard, trying to get him to drop the scalpel. Although he had received such a fierce hit on his hand, he did not let go of the scalpel. Not only that, he was still intending to make for Mikado with the knife in the stance after being hit.

“An attack like that won't be able to shatter my love!”

He was still thinking about advancing with the head girl in tow as he said those words that were clearly out of place in the situation.

As if he wanted to intimidate all the opponents before him, Seiji tightly gripped the knife in his hand and sharply swung it down to one side. Celty on seeing that, panicked and lashed out a second time, but—

“It won't work!”

“Oi, just what's this guy on?”

Kadota looked at Seiji with utter disbelief, but Seiji's eyes kept their steadiness, and the pain hadn't even caused him to so much as a quiver.

“It won't work! It hurts, but I can ignore it! Celty and I...we don't need any pain or sadness in our lives! So that's why I don't think the pain I feel now is really pain at all!”

“What are you talking about?!”

On hearing Mikado's outburst, Celty raised her scythe, deciding to 'sever' the opponent's wrist tendons.

—What's wrong with this guy? I have to stop him quickly, or it'd be dangerous...is this his so-called display of love? What's wrong with his values? Or should I say—the values humans have are actually different from mine? I don't understand, I don't understand I don't understand I don't understand—

As if she was trying to dissipate her fears, Celty raised her scythe slightly. And without her noticing, the two sides of the scythe had become very sharp, as though they'd been painstakingly filed. On seeing that, Mikado and the rest who had been surrounding them took a big step back.

So, in the moment Celty lowered her scythe in the direction of Seiji's wrist; —

“Hold it aaaaaaaaaahhhhhh!”

A sharp shriek had caused everyone around to stop moving.

Besides two people, who were Seiji and 'her'.

The moment before the girl with scars on her neck could block Celty's scythe—Seiji had already sensed her movements and had instead come forth to protect her. The scythe had stopped right in front of Seiji's body, and hadn't hurt anyone in the end.

Then, everyone turned to look in the direction of the girl, curiosity and surprise on their faces.

When Celty had raised her scythe and struck down towards Seiji, the one who had risked death to protect him—was the girl who looked like the ‘head’ and who called herself Celty. The way she’d screamed and defended Seiji like that was totally different from the docile appearance she’d kept before.

“Please stop! Seiji-san, Seiji-san is just a little strict, a little violent, and he’s different from other people, but he saved me! He saved me, saved me and Anri, and, besides...he has someone he likes. So...so you can’t...kill...him”

Her voice slowly began to quiver, and tears started streaming down her face, and she fell back into Seiji’s embrace.

—Could it be...could it be could it be...

So, the Dullahan realised.

—That’s not right. This isn’t ‘my head’—

Practically at the same time, Mikado had realised who she really was.

—This girl isn’t the Dullahan’s head—! She’s—

“Harima...Mika...?”

To Mikado’s question, which sounded more like something he was saying to himself, she began to shiver uncontrollably and averted her gaze.

“Am I right? You’re the person whom we thought Yagiri-kun killed—Harima Mika, right?”

“Impossible.”

That last phrase left Yagiri Seiji’s mouth. In the span of time that he’d heard her voice and her name, a lot of memories came to mind. It was the stalker girl who looked so much like her. And also the person...whose head he’d smashed against the wall, and assumed to have died.

“Oi, he’s lying right?”

“...I’m sorry! I’m sorry! I’m...so sorry...”

“Actually...I didn’t really die! I was still alive...and then Seiji-san’s siser asked me...asked me if I wanted Seiji-san to like me...! I...although I was almost killed by Seiji-san, but I still really like Seiji-san...! Then...then they got a doctor...and he said with a some plastic surgery, and some make-up...then I’d look just like that head...the head that Seiji-san’s in love with!”

On hearing that, Celty’s body suddenly jolted.

“But...then, the doctor said: ‘Your name is Celty, it’s that head’s name’ ...so I wanted to become Celty for Seiji-san...but, Namie-san said it wasn’t enough...she said I’d be exposed immediately...so I had to undergo surgery to remove my emotions and memories...! But I...I didn’t want to forget my feelings for Seiji-san...I wanted to tell him how much I loved him! So I...I escaped from the research facility!”

Seiji’s sister, had apparently wanted to use a live person to impersonate the ‘head’, in order to break up

her brother and the ‘head’. All this had been so that her brother could return to being a normal person, but her jealousy towards the head—and unfortunately, even Namie herself was unable to notice that clearly.

On hearing that confession, the numerous shards in Celty’s heart had began to piece themselves together, to give a final, complete picture.

There were only a few people who knew Celty’s name, and of them, the only one who knew she was a Dullahan was—Kishitani Shinra. He was the person Celty was living with, the ‘underground doctor’ who knew her secret.

Celty began to think back to the beginning, and suddenly remembered when she had wanted to investigate the pharmaceutical and university research facilities to find out the whereabouts of her head, Shinra had suggested on his own accord:

(I know some people working at Yagiri Pharmaceuticals, so I’ll investigate there for you. It’s not wise for you to owe Orihara Izaya anything when you can use me to do this kind of thing.)

So he’d gone to investigate, and finally reported that there hadn’t been anything dubious there. But perhaps he’d know that the ‘head’ was at Yagiri Pharmaceuticals from the beginning. He’d even hid that fact from her, and had offered to help investigate of his own accord—

Celty clenched her fist tightly, without a second glance at Mika and Seiji, she merely bowed towards Mikado and leapt onto her motorcycle.

Then, under the cover of night, the engine of the motorbike let out a deafening roar.

As if declaring that the night’s banquet had ended, it was the most passionate call that had sounded that night.

“You’re...lying. How could it...: Then I...I...”

With the intention of delivering the final blow to the dazed Seiji, the bad guy sidled quietly to his side:

“In the end, you couldn’t even tell which was the real one. To put it bluntly, the love you have for that ‘head’ is only at this level. Tough.”

Orihara Izaya’s words, had caused Seiji to snap completely, and he fell to his knees.

“Seiji-san!”

The person who had rushed over the moment she’d seen that, was the girl with the ring of scars around her neck, his classmate—Harima Mika.

To Mikado, it seemed very much like a rather hilarious comedy, but he couldn’t exactly laugh at it.

After thinking for a while, Mikado walked towards them, and sheepishly began to speak:

“Uh...although you couldn’t tell she was a fake, but you still risked your life to protect her. I think that’s really admirable.”

After comforting Seiji a little like that, he proceeded to tell them:

“When I heard about what happened to Harima-san before, I think I must have misunderstood. There are

some problems with her personality, but she's definitely not a stalker."

The words that followed, were said as if he was talking to himself:

"Eh... in the end she still ended up troubling you like this. And, as far as stalkers go, all she's done so far is just show possessiveness of you. But, she willingly risked her life for Yagiri-kun. I don't think she'd do just a thing if it really was just selfish possessiveness. And from another angle, it's really admirable how she can still like the person who almost killed her..."

After leaving one last unnecessary phrase behind, he left the street in the night.

"I think, Harima-san...is a lot like Yagiri-kun."



Beside Kawagoe Highway A Condominium Late at night

At the same time she'd unlocked the door, Celty kicked open the door to Shinra's house.

"Oh, you're back."

Shinra who was typing something on the computer in the living room, welcomed her with his usual smile.

Celty had absolutely no intention of removing her boots made out of 'shadow', and stormed over to the youth clad in white. Then, without any explanation, she grabbed his collar.

She was in no mood at all to type on the computer, and she didn't think she'd be able to resolve her anger by beating him up. Just as Celty was thinking about how she should deal with him—

"You probably want to say: 'What the hell are you doing?' Right?"

In the calmest tone possible, Shinra revealed exactly what Celty had been thinking.

"And then you would say: 'You knew all along did not you? You probably knew twenty years ago that my head was in that research facility? And your father, and you, have been in cahoots with Yagiri Pharmaceuticals since the beginning! No, now that I think about it, the first them you met me, both of you were strangely calm! Perhaps even, the person who stole my head from my body was your father?! And you knew all that and you still hid it from me, and you even took that job as an underground doctor, and just performed surgery on that dying girl! I may be a monster, but someone like you who just devours people like that without a single qualm, is the real monster'...something like that right?"

"...!"

"That's right, let me clarify this, lest you misunderstand...I don't know my father was the thief who stole your head, nor am I interested in knowing. And, she went through that minor surgery because she wanted too. Perhaps the people at Yagiri Pharmaceuticals coaxed her into making that decision, but I don't really care that much."

After hearing what Shinra had to say, Celty relaxed the grip she had on his collar.

And even her quivering fist, had become still as if time had stopped.

—If I could talk, I'd...probably say exactly the same thing.

In the face of such a pensive Celty, Shinra showed a relatively masochistic smile and said:

“—You want to ask: ‘How did you know what I wanted to say?’ Right? But there’s nothing good to ask about that.”

Shinra was sure this was what Celty was thinking, so he didn’t wait for an answer and went on:

“Hm, I know. After all, I’ve loved you for twenty years, so of course I’d know this much.”

“...”

“If we were to talk about how I know...well I would say that it’s because when humans are judging how the other party is feelings, they depend too much on facial expressions. Subtler things like the sound of footsteps, and changes in muscle tension can also tell you what someone is feeling. Especially me, since I’ve been watching you for so long after all...”

—What’s the use of saying all this? Even so, why wouldn’t you ever tell me where my head was?

As if he’d read Celty’s mind, Shinra forced out the next sentence:

“It’s because I love you. That’s why I wouldn’t tell you where your head was.”

“...?”

“Because once you find your head, you’ll disappear from before my eyes. I won’t be able to accept that.”

His reason had been borne of his selfishness, yet his words shone so purely:

“I won’t say things like I’m going to give up for the sake of your happiness. For the sake of our love, I’ll fight it out to the end. I said it before didn’t I? I’ll do everything in my power to achieve victory in the game of fate that we share. That was why, I used that poor girl. She’s called Mika-chan, right? I made use of her to make you give up on your head. I’ll never let you leave me. And in order to achieve that goal, I don’t care if I have to make use of other people’s love or death or myself—this may seem a little contradictory, but I’ll even make use of your feelings.

Those words sounded rather twisted at first, but there was not a hint of insincerity and guilt clouded his eyes.

On hearing that, Celty felt a little discouraged. She had initially decided that should Shinra start playing dumb or making bad excuses, she’d give him a beating to remember, then run out the door and never come back to see him again. But Celty was at a loss for words when she heard him explain himself so clearly.

Tentatively, Celty let Shinra down, and typed furiously on her keyboard as if she was venting her anger on it.

*Even if get my head back, I won’t leave you.*

“That’s your opinion. Your head might not agree.”

Shinra's reply was stern, and bore no trace of his usual teasing manner.

"I've always wondered, in this wide world, why were you the only one to appear before humans? Just how were you different from the other Dullahans? So I thought—it's probably because of your head. It's because you don't have a head that you can materialise and exist in this world. That's what I think."

As if he was reading out a tragedy novel he'd written himself, Shinra finished with a rather melancholic expression on his face.

"In that case, when you find your head and regain all your memories...what if you disappear like mist in the morning sun, as if everything before was just a dream? That's what I'm afraid of."

Celty quietly walked to the chair nearby and sat down. For a moment, in the silence, she remained motionless.

Then, in the momentarily still room, the tapping of a keyboard resounded.

*Will you believe what I'm going to say?*

"I believe you. Or perhaps more precisely, you're the only one I'll believe."

After affirming his response, Celty began typing out the words that echoed the thoughts in her heart.

*I'm...scared too.*

*I'm scared, I'm scared I'll 'die'.*

*I well aware I'm invincible. I know that no one can kill me at the moment. I'm not boasting, it's purely a fact that I should accept. I'm not happy or pleased with that fact in any way. But...no, or rather, it's because I'm invincible that I'm scared. My body doesn't contain the core that is my 'death'. So there's only one possibility—and that is, that my head is that core. Should anyone destroy my head at any one time without my knowledge...then, regardless of what I think now, or what kind of situation I'm in, I'll—*

Celty didn't finish type out the last part, and after all, her fingers began typing a new line:

*Will you believe me? Someone like me who has no eyes or a brain, can actually dream. Do you believe that the nightmares I have make me shake in fear? It's because I'm scared, so I want to be able to control my own death, and it's because of that that I'll keep looking for my head. If I say that—will you believe me?*

Shinra's eyes had not missed a single word of the monologue that the Dullahan had typed out on the screen.

He waited for her fingers to stop moving before replying promptly:

"I said it just now—you're the only person I'll believe."

After just saying that, Shinra cheerfully broke into smile—and looking as if he was about to cry, he laughed:

"This is all really bewildering. We're actually...getting so worked up over our own speculations."

*We're both being idiots aren't we?*

The Dullahan slowly stood up, and typed out a few short sentences with one hand on the computer.

*Hey Shinra.*

“What is it?”

*Let me hit you.*

“Alright.”

Shinra’s answer came without hesitation. Celty was similarly unhesitant, and landed a direct punch to Shinra’s face.

There was a loud crash, and the youth in white landed heavily on the floor.

Blood trickled from the corner of Shinra’s mouth, and he lay sprawled on the floor. He lay there for a while, and then suddenly got up. He turned to Celty, and sought her agreement:

“Now, let me you hit you once too.”

Normally, he would never ask to hit her, but nevertheless, she still acceded to his request.

After making sure the empty helmet was facing the front—

With a light punch, Shinra knocked off the helmet.

It fell to the ground with a thump, and Celty’s helmet rolled about on the floor for a bit.

—?

Celty couldn’t understand the meaning behind Shinra’s meaningless gesture and lapsed into silence. And as for the underground doctor, he massaged his smarting hand, he smiled:

“See, Celty’s the most beautiful when she’s honest with herself.”

As he looked at the place that was clearly missing something, Shinra went on:

“Let’s just take that punch as our wedding kiss.”

On hearing Shinra say...that, Celty buried herself in Shinra’s chest, and punched him hard in the gut.

“Guh!”

Then, she leaned against Shinra’s body.

At the same time, her left hand typed on the keyboard:

*You really are an idiot.*

In that moment that had no need for words, Shinra gently held Celty.

Feeling her body jerking sporadically—Shinra realised, she was crying.







Shinjuku Early morning

Everything she had done had been for her brother.

But to be more precise, none of what she had done had benefited Seiji in the least. More truthfully, she had done all that for her own happiness, urged on by her desire to see her brother's smile—but she was entirely unaware of that.

After that uproar, Yagiri Namie had immediately taken the 'head' and left the research facility. As she had expected, not long after she'd left, the news of a black bike—a Dullahan's body raiding the research facilities had reached her. But the head was already in her hands. If she were to let the Dullahan get her head back, her brother might lapse into the depths of depression, or maybe even simply just take that 'body' as his soulmate as well.

Either way, none of that was what Namie wanted to see.

She had to be in control of the 'head' at all times. She wanted her brother to look only at her. That was her only wish.

And as she held up her cellphone and placed a call to ask her uncle for help, she heard an unbelievable piece of news.

Her uncle said that there had been an emergency meeting for the board of directors that night, and the takeover by Nebula had just been confirmed. It looked like the head office, or perhaps Nebula had been closely observing not only the night's commotion, but all the disputes involving the research facility as well. It wasn't clear who had proposed that, but either way, both parties had come to an agreement for a merger before even more serious problems cropped up.

Of course, Nebula had requested for something, and it had been the Dullahan's head.

Namie ended the call with practically enough force to crush the phone, and turned the car around.

She had decided not to ever return to the office, but, she had to find an organization which would help her hide the 'head'.

She probably wouldn't be very successful if she were to approach the underground for help, since the 'head' wouldn't benefit them in anyway. If she were to take it to another research facility, she'd probably be received with courtesy because of the data she had with her, but she'd still have to deal with the fact that the 'head' would no longer be in her hands.

She'd already run out of options. Finally she chose to seek refuge with one person—

"This is the first time we've met face to face right? Did that list of illegal immigrants come in handy?"

So Namie who had run away with the head, had come to Orihara Izaya's abode.

"But you've really done some silly things. In order to gain your brother's twisted love, you've abandoned everything. Or should I say, for the twisted love you have for your brother?"

Izaya softly ridiculed her, and at the same time he placing some Othello pieces on the game board. Although his attention and words were all directed towards Namie who was sitting before him, his eyes never left the game board.

"You're superiors couldn't just have sat still, could they? Nebula is such a large scale international company, no, it's a megacorp with a large influence even in America."

He set down another Othello piece, and now two black Othello pieces were on either side of a shogi pawn.

"Alright, the pawn is promoted."

As he said that, he immediately turned the pawn piece over, and picked up the king as if nothing had happened. An outsider watching him would definitely have no idea what he was doing. But to him, it probably carried some kind of meaning.

"So, you're in pretty dire straits now huh. Maybe the mafia'll try to hunt you down, or you might get shot right between the eye by some expert sniper hired by a Swiss bank, like 'pam', checkmate."

The king in Izaya's hand moved a space forward and captured the king on the other side.

"I wonder what'll happen if there's a rule where the kings can have a one-on-one fight."

Then, Izaya finally looked at Namie. Namie had a rather impatient look on her fast. She didn't have the heart to respond to Izaya's nonsensical statements.

Izaya opened the specialized briefcase beside the gameboard, and stared at the 'head' that was inside.

Then, he started a strange conversation with Namie:

"I'm guessing, I'm just like your uncle. He probably believes in the afterworld less than anyone else, fears dying more than anyone else, and wants to go to heaven more than anyone else."

As she listened to Izaya's reasoning, Namie began to think of her uncle's face. Just as she began to speculate about his way of thinking, she was shocked to realize that besides her brother, she was completely uninterested in other members of her family. Although she was trying every way possible to recall her uncle's personality, she was still unable to remember it clearly.

"But, I've already confirmed it. I'm very sure that there'll definitely be an afterworld. Let's just take it as that."

He was gazing at the beautiful face of Celty's 'head'. Izaya played with her hair with his fingers and said slyly:

"It is said that by principle, the Dullahans of lore were all female. Do you know why that is?"

"...No I don't. Some of my subordinates were researching those legends, but I've always thought it was a waste of time."

"So you're a rationalist. Alright, but no matter what you think...there are many myths and legends that have things in common with each other, and are sometimes even related. In Scandinavian mythology, a heaven called Valhalla exists...actually, it's not really a heaven. Either way, a place like that just exists. A

similar concept exists in Celtic mythology, where departed souls rest in a place called the Otherworld. Now, back to Scandinavian folklore which believes in the existence of female angels in armor called Valkyries, who look for the souls brave warriors and guide them to Valhalla—speaking of women in armour who seek the dead, haven't you heard something like that before?"

—So what?

Namie had absolutely no idea about the point Izaya was trying to make. She only felt that the smile plastered to his face was slowly looking more and more like a mask, looking keener and keener.

"That's why one explanation states that the Valkyries wandering the human realm are actually Dullahans. That's why Dullahans are female, and most of them have been reportedly wearing armour. If this is really the case—then that 'head' is probably waiting. Waiting for it's time to wait, waiting for a war, waiting for the time to guide that saintly warrior to Valhalla."

Even though everything he said after that was purely Izaya's own speculations, yet he went on just as if he was explaining facts:

"The reason why this head is alive but still in a deep slumber is because it's not a battlefield here. If it's possible, I'd like to be that chosen warrior. But, even if I take this head to the warzones in the Middle East, I won't be able to survive on a battlefield.

Then, his voice suddenly changed into that of a youth who was anticipating something eagerly. His smile had already cut off all ties with humanity.

"If it's really possible to go to the place called Valhalla after one dies, just what would I have to do to get there? Besides starting a war...well the only way is to start a where. But, even if I go to the Middle East, I won't be able to do anything. So that's why, I'll have to start a war which only I can fight, a war which only I can win, isn't that right?"

Izaya finished, and pressed his finger down on one corner of the game board, and as if using his entire body to convey his happiness, spun the board around forcefully. The Othello, shogi and chess pieces covering the board flew off in all directions, finally leaving behind the promoted shogi pawn in the middle of the game board.

"If...right here in Tokyo... a 'war' that has nothing to do with the army or the government were to start...I have confidence that I'll be able to survive to the end. Goodness, I'm so lucky! I don't believe in heaven, and I chose a life where I could never get into heaven...and it's because of all that that someone like me was able to meet a fallen angel!"

Izaya showed that emotionless smile, expressing pure joy. And within his laughter and happiness, there was absolutely no room for anyone else. Thus, Namie who had initially intended to say something, could only retort with something stale like:

"That's...just your own speculation."

"Those who believe will never perish. And I've said it before, this is just insurance. That's why...I'm doing my best to insure myself, to make sure I'll be to get to the 'afterlife'. Even if I go to hell after I do...even if there's only pain after death...it's fine as long as 'I' continue existing in the afterlife. But, if it's possible, I'd much rather go to heaven."

Then, Izaya casually asked Namie something, as if he was inviting a girl out for a meal:

"That's right, Namie-san. Let's all go to heaven together."

As she looked at Izaya's masklike smile, Namie realized only then, that she'd given that 'angel' to the last person who should have her.

And then Izaya smiled lightly at Namie who was thinking that and said:

"As a member of the Dollars, I'm best suited to safeguard this head. As the saying goes 'A ten-foot lighthouse shines far, not near'—Celty will never know to think, her head is right in the group she's part of."

—Dollars? Celty's a member of it?

Information that Namie had never known, invaded her senses in waves. And just as she her mind was swirling in confusion, Izaya ebulliently offered her a devilish invitation.

"You join the Dollars too. After all, our motto is 'All are welcome'. Even though...I was the one who started inviting people in later on."

He sounded like he was teasing her, yet it was like he was in love with her, and perhaps he was wishing her well.

"Let's help this fallen angel—spread her wings and fly. Alright?"



South Ikebukuro Park Morning

This is a twisted story.

"I don't love you."

Under the sky that was steadily turning white, a boy and girl sat on a park bench, in each other's embrace.

"But, when I look at you, I won't forget my 'love' for her, and I won't forget my determination. So I'll accept your love. Until the day—I find her."

Seiji said that in a hardly discernible whisper, gently holding Mika against his chest.

And in his embrace, Mika quietly smiled. And as she smiled, she silently resolved.

—In order for Seiji to truly love me, I have to become that 'head'. So, even if I have to sacrifice everything else, I will still keep on loving him. In order to help him find the head, I'll do anything, and I won't mind at all. And when I find that head, I'll cut it into pieces before Seiji's eyes, grind them up and pour them into my mouth—so that she'll become my flesh and blood. I'll do it all just for him, for him, for him—

This was all so that their love became one that could finally exist when that moment came.

It was a love that was so innocent, yet so infinitely warped.

Their silhouettes seemed so transient and beautiful, yet at the same time, it seemed so hopelessly twisted.



エピローグ

Epilogue

日常表

# Epilogue: Everyday Life—On The Surface

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Much like a young kid who wanted to talk about what happened in yesterday's anime, an innocent smile spread across Masaomi's face:

"Hey, Mikado, I saw it online...I heard there was a Dollars gathering yesterday! And it turns out Simon and Shizuo are part of the Dollars! And and, that black biker really doesn't have a head, and he rode up a wall, and he even had this huge scythe which went like 'BWAA—' and everything was like super amazing!"

"I have no idea what you're talking about."

Something so big had just happened, but obviously the school wouldn't disappear because of that. The school bell still rang like nothing had happened, and normal classes went on as always.

That day during lunch, Mikado went up to the roof of the first school building. At that time, almost everyone in the school had gone to have lunch at the student cafeteria which was of the same standard as that of an eatery in a private university, or had gone out to eat at some shop—but there were some students who were different from them, and preferred taking their bentos up to the roof to eat.

The sky was the same whether he was looking from the roof or from the street, and Mikado then realized, it was the exact same sky from his hometown. Something perfectly natural like that. The strange thing was, he'd clearly experienced so many extraordinary things, yet the feelings in his heart were inexplicably down-to-earth. It felt very much like he was experiencing the day after that of a long-anticipated school trip.

The day after that event, Mikado, rubbing his bleary eyes, had gone to school and noticed that Yagiri Seiji was seated at his seat as though nothing had happened. During lessons, he hadn't even looked at Mikado once. Then when the first period had ended, he'd come over to him and said: "I'm sorry for having caused you so much trouble."

Then, he'd turned and returned to his seat.

And even more shockingly, Harima Mika had showed up in school as well, perfectly composed. Anri was slightly startled when she saw that Mika's face was now different from what she'd remembered. But it was the first time the other students had seen her and they were pretty curious about her, and not only about the bandages on her neck.

Mika who sat beside Mikado had just said "Thank you" to him after class, and then run off to stick herself to Seiji.

"Despicable. So she's Seiji's girlfriend! So it's like that! A hot girlfriend like her, no wonder he says he lives for love!"

Masaomi began complaining as he saw their actions. But Mikado who knew their troubles could only give a pained laugh and say "Yeah" to that.

But, it was also because of that that Mika and Anri wouldn't be together anymore. Every time class ended, Anri always sit by herself in a corner of the classroom. And Mikado would always watch her from afar with a strange feeling inside him.

Whether that development was for better or for worse, only she herself knew.

—But, is it really like that? Is there really no way for me to know? Could it be that humans really don't have the ability to perceive the thoughts of others?

(You have no choice but to keep evolving.)

Izaya's words rang out in his mind.

—That's right, I'll definitely evolve. I want to see how much I can evolve in this everyday life of mine, in this world I'm living in. One day, I'll let that person see what I can truly do.

Whether his goal was to rise up or to sink lower—would presently remain unknown. But he was definitely still moving towards his goal. It was just that, now he had a little more room for circumspection.

Mikado looked out from the classroom window, and looked to that huge sixty storey building, and began to reflect on his current feelings.

After experiencing something that had completely defied normality, what was left was in fact a curious feeling of both fulfillment and emptiness.

—The me now, will definitely be able to face reality straight up and accept it.

But before he faced himself honestly, there was something else he needed to do.

So, he had gone up to the rooftop. Because he'd heard, she went there for lunch everyday.

He thought that nothing would be able to hinder him ever again if he could do something so bold. He thought he wouldn't be afraid of anything ever again—

He didn't think, he'd freeze up at that juncture.

Online, it was so easy for him to talk to just about anyone...

But he had never expected at all, that fulfilling such a tiny wish in his everyday life would be so difficult.

—I didn't think I'd need so much courage just to ask a girl from my class out.

Time before the youth notices Anri, another thirty seconds

Time before the youth sees Masaomi hitting on Anri, another thirty five seconds

Time before the youth gives Masaomi a flying kick, another forty five seconds

Time before the youth gets a roundhouse kick from Masaomi, another fifty seconds

Time before the youth invites Anri out for tea, another seventy three seconds

Time before the youth's offer to go out for tea is rejected by Anri, another seventy four seconds

Time before the youth accepts Anri's invitation to have lunch with her on the roof, another seventy eight seconds

Time before the youth falls in love with Anri, another—

Time before the youth confesses to Anri, another—

Chatroom.

After that day had come to an end, Mikado slowly turned on his computer. He was intending to see what kind of response had been generated from yesterday's commotion. However, there weren't any particularly heated discussions. There were a few people who posted some things about the Dullahan, but not many people paid heed to them.

—Well, it was to be expected.

After giving a pained smile, he went on the chatroom he went on practically every day. It was the chatroom Izaya, under the alias of Kanra, had invited him to join. So at this point, he only had one online friend whose username was Setton.

—That person also said that Kanra—Orihara Izaya invited him. I hope he isn't someone from the underground as well...

—Tanaka Taro-san has entered the chatroom—

【Good evening.】

[Evening. I've been waiting here by myself for a long time.]

【Is that so? But I'm pretty sleepy today, so I'll probably go off earlier.】

[Oh, not enough sleep? You stayed up late last night?]

【Yeah, I had something on.】

[I wonder when Kanra will be coming on.]

【Kanra...I wonder if he's even coming.】

[Ah, I'm sorry, something came up here, so I'll go off first.]

【Ah? I see...】

[So sorry, I'll go off now.]

【Hm, alright then.】

—Setton-san has left the chatroom—

“Sorry for interrupting your fun.”

The man in white smiled apologetically behind Celty.

*It's alright.*

After tapping a few times on the keyboard with one hand, Celty got up from the chair.

"That's good. Today's job seems pretty dangerous, so be careful. You're supposed to..."

After accepting the job request, Celty walked out the door soundlessly.

With that—Celt had begun another day.



# Epilogue: Everyday Life—Beneath The Surface

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A black shadow cruised down National Highway No. 254.

It was a black bike with no headlights. And far in front of it, a few patrol cars illuminated the darkness of the night with a red glow.

And in front of these patrol cars, a dry explosion could be heard.

On hearing that sound—the initially silent motorcycle's engines cried out to the street in the night.



“Ah, it’s that Dullahan.”

“Iyaya, it’s really cool. That guy’s definitely CG.”

Karisawa and Yumasaki were happily discussing that as Celty sped past a van.

Although they had seen Celty’s true self for themselves, they didn’t really seem to be able to understand gravity of the present situation. Not only them, everyone who had seen her fighting then, had surprisingly, naturally accepted her existence.

Perhaps it was that feeling of not being able to question whatever it was as well as her dignified presence that caused people to be unable to believe in it and instead think of it as merely a dream—or perhaps, it was because she had long become a part of that ‘city’.

There were some people who posted things about what had happened online and naturally, they were laughed off in the end.

As such, rumours began spreading online that the gathering that night had actually been some kind of a hoax. In the end, the name of the Dollars did not further spread. But this ending was probably much better than if it had gotten the police’s or some underworld organisation’s attention.

To those who had gone to that gathering, the events of that night were etched deeply into their hearts.

“But why did he show up at our meeting?”

Kadota who was seated at the passenger seat up front, spoke without turning his head back:

“Did you know, that black biker...is actually a member of the Dollars.”

“Eh? For real?!”

“That’s the first time I’ve heard something like that! So that’s why he went all out in front of us!”

“That’s totally awesome! With him there, the Dollars will be completely invincible!”

As he listened to Yumasaki and Karisawa’s various exclamations in the back, Kadota quietly closed his eyes.

He thought back to what Izaya had said to him when he was about to leave the place that night.

(Dotachin, I’ve met the head of the Dollars. Do you want to know how our group’s name came about?)

(Isn’t it because of something like “Give me your dollars?”)

(Not like that. Our group pretty much focuses on doing nothing, and yet the name is still pretty good—that’s right, they don’t do anything. All of them just gather and go *dara dara*<sup>6</sup>. That’s about it.)

In actuality, that group didn’t really have any internal structure. The group Dollars was nothing more than a fortress wall, allowing those which had entered to change the country however they liked. Later, it all depended on how beautiful or intimidating those inside could make the walls.

—Even if didn’t have any substance, its mere appearance was good enough for its name to stick around...it wasn’t that different from humans.

Kadota looked ahead at the commotion which seemed like that from a ‘carnival’, and smiled as though he was mocking himself.

—Just like that black biker guy.



Using the side of the truck as she would the ground, she soared past, managing to shake off the patrol cars. Beside the officer who had his eyes widened, the cameramen were visibly excited. It looked like he was getting footage for a special programme featuring wanted criminals that was frequently aired on television.

Even though she had noticed the camera, Celty still proceeded to form her scythe with her ‘shadow’ without hesitating for a second.

Holding high that never before seen, over three metre long scythe—Celty cried out into the night.

—Just film if you want to film, look if you want to look. Burn this monster’s image into the earth! So what?

—This is my life. These are the marks that I’ve left behind after so many years, I have nothing to be ashamed of.

She no longer hid in the darkness, but instead shone brightly in it. She would choose her own path to walk, without caring too much about right and wrong.

Ordinary days, days without too much hope or despair. Knowing that nothing could be changed, yet feeling contentment beyond compare.

As she swung down her enormous scythe on the black bulletproof vehicles, Celty realized.

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<sup>6</sup> *dara dara*: meaning to well, not do anything. Dollars is pronounced as ‘Darazu’ in Japanese

Ever since that night when she'd revealed herself in that city, she'd gotten even more attached to it than she had ever been before.

Perhaps even more so than with that head of hers which whereabouts still remained unknown—

The car windows opened, and the person inside fired a gun at Celty.

The bullet shattered the visor, and entered the helmet.

And in that empty space—the shadow was unmistakably smiling.

# Afterword

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Hello everyone, nice to meet you, or if I've met you before, then long time no see, I'm Narita.

Thank you so much for buying this book 'Durarara!!'!

Don't you feel a little mystified by just looking at the title? But if you've finished reading the story then...you still don't get the meaning behind it right? It all happened when I was editing the finished draft of the book and my editor called and asked, "Isn't it time to give an official title to the Public Relations department?"

So I just randomly gave a name, "Du...Durarara?"

And in exchange for those string of syllables, the editor said:

"Not bad. I kind of like ambiguous titles. Let's just use it...but, how do you write it in English?"

I hadn't thought it'd get through at all so while I was busy being stunned, the editor asked, "...Do you want to add a '!' behind like in 'Baccano!' and 'BoWWow!?'?"

I would never believed it would be accepted like that, so my thoughts were kind of muddled-up so I just said carelessly, "It's rare that I get a chance like this so let's just add two exclamation marks then."

There was a short period of silence, and I could hear the sound of a pen being used to write something over the phone, and then suddenly the sound of my editor's explosive laughter.

"Wahahahaha! It looks really stupid when you write it down! It's rare that we get this chance so let's just go with it."

Thus the title 'Durarara!!' was born—although to this day I'm still not quite sure what it's supposed to mean.

The reason why I've used Ikebukuro as the setting for the story isn't because I want to ride on the current popularity of a certain novel and drama series, but more of because it's the city I'm most familiar with.

In this particular work, I've portrayed Ikebukuro and Shinjuku relatively rather subjectively, and I've also thrown in many fictional elements, so to those who haven't been to those places: please don't take it seriously. As for those readers who have been there, if you could take it easy and read my works with an attitude like 'This guy's such a liar!', I would be most happy. As for the parts about colour gangs and the underworld, similarly, please bear with it—oh...and I'm glad I could make myself clear now so that people with grievances like 'This author acting like he knows everything', 'You think it's funny to make fun of us gangs?', 'If you've got balls, come to Ikebukuro at night' will be able to look past all that.

\*There may be some spoilers mentioned below

In Dengeki Bunko, it could be said that this book could be considered a little different. Having a main character with nothing above their neck was already weird enough. To the editor who accepted this crazy story of mine and as well as to Yasuda-sensei who did the illustrations, I give my utmost thanks.

And this time, I tried putting as many jokes into the story as I could. Admittedly I went a little overboard at some points, so that's why I've mentally prepared myself for my punishment—but the things I've put in are...things that I feel that are pretty interesting, so please read these jokes with an open mind.

Since a long time ago, there have been lots of stories of headless creatures looking for their heads. One example would be the recently made movie, 'Sleepy Hollow'. Either way, using headless creatures as the main theme for thrillers are usually really impactful. But although some people feel that the Dullahan in 'Sleepy Hollow' is the Dullahan in all those rumours, but I don't think so.

It is said that the Dullahan isn't really the main theme. If you were to dig deeper into the details of the story, you'd find sources that say that the two-wheeled carriage is actually made of bones of the deceased, and that the Dullahan is actually descended from Badhbh Catha, a member of a trio of war goddesses—all which I haven't included. Thus I hope everyone can see that in 'Durarara!!', Celty is Celty and the Dullahans in other stories are themselves.

If I have a chance to continue writing the 'Durarara!!' series, I would say there could possibly be even more extreme developments in the story. For example things like 'Dullahan vs. Yellow Scarves' or 'Dullahan vs. Headhunter'—although I was scolded when I raised those ideas.

\*Below are the usual acknowledgements

I'd like to thank my editor Suzuki whom I'm always troubling as well as my editor for two of my works as of the start of this one, Wada-sama.

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